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S'pore welcomes KL's move to ease tensions

Malaysian minister here on visit after Singapore protests against 'provocative act' by Johor leader

Nadirah H. Rodzi
Malaysia Correspondent
In Kuala Lumpur

Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said yesterday that it welcomed Malaysian Economic Affairs Minister Mohamed Azmin Ali's initiative to visit Singapore, despite the postponement of an annual bilateral meeting due to a "provocative act" by the chief minister of Johor.

Datuk Seri Azmin began a two-day visit yesterday that includes meetings with Singapore's National Development Minister Lawrence Wong and Foreign

Minister Vivian Balakrishnan. Dr Balakrishnan said on Facebook that he had a "good meeting of minds" over dinner with Mr Azmin. He also posted a photo of himself and the Malaysian minister chatting while on a stroll along the Singapore River.

He added that he had an open and candid discussion with Mr Azmin and both reaffirmed that there are "far more opportunities for Malaysia and Singapore to work together, especially at this time of global economic transformation".

The meeting comes in the wake of a decision by Singapore to push

back the Joint Ministerial Committee for Iskandar Malaysia (JMCIM), originally scheduled for today.

Responding to media queries yesterday, the ministry revealed that it had sent a protest note to the Malaysian government on Friday over an intrusion by the Johor chief minister.

"Singapore sent a diplomatic note to Malaysia on Jan 11, 2019 to protest the unauthorised visit by Johor Menteri Besar Dato' Osman Sapian on Jan 9, 2019 to Marine Department Malaysia vessel Pedoman, which was anchored illegally in Singapore territorial waters off Tuas," it said.

"Such a provocative act went against the spirit of the agreement reached a day earlier by Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, and his Malaysian counterpart, Dato' Sa-

fuddin Abdullah, to resolve bilateral issues in a calm and constructive manner."

It added that the intrusion created an atmosphere "unconducive" for holding the meeting, which led to a decision by Singapore – agreed to by Malaysia – to postpone it.

"Nevertheless, Singapore welcomes Malaysia's Minister of Economic Affairs Dato' Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali's initiative to make a bilateral visit and his upcoming meetings with our ministers on Jan 13 to 14," the ministry said.

Earlier yesterday, the Malaysian Foreign Ministry had released its own statement, expressing its confidence in the current momentum of engagement between Malaysia and Singapore and stressing that it is committed to strengthening bilateral ties with the Republic.

Malaysia said the planned alternative meeting between ministers "demonstrates that ties between the two countries remain strong".

The meeting will form "the next positive step forward after the fruitful bilateral meeting" held between the foreign ministers of Malaysia and Singapore on Jan 8, the statement added.

"The ministry is confident that the current momentum of engagement between Malaysia and Singapore will continue and reiterates its commitment to strengthen bilateral relations with Singapore based on equality and mutual respect."

It also said the foreign ministers of both countries "are in communication and agreed that both sides should remain calm and not sensationalise the matter".

But amid the niceties in the statement was also a rephrasing of the content of Singapore's diplomatic note to imply that the Johor chief minister had not intruded. It said: "The reason for the postponement, as conveyed by Singapore vide a diplomatic note dated Jan 11, 2019, was due to the visit by YAB Dato' Osman Sapian, the Chief Minister of Johor, to Johor Baru port in Malaysian territorial waters on Jan 9."

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Last-ditch bid to win backing for Brexit deal

British Prime Minister Theresa May has made a last-ditch appeal for support ahead of a key Parliament vote tomorrow on the Brexit deal she agreed with the European Union.

Writing in the Sunday Express newspaper, Mrs May warned that defeat for the government at the House of Commons vote would amount to a "catastrophic and unforgivable breach of trust in our democracy".

Mrs May postponed a vote on the deal last month to avoid defeat and the deal looks set to be rejected by MPs tomorrow. Opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said his party would table a no-confidence vote in the government "soon" if she loses the vote.

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A5

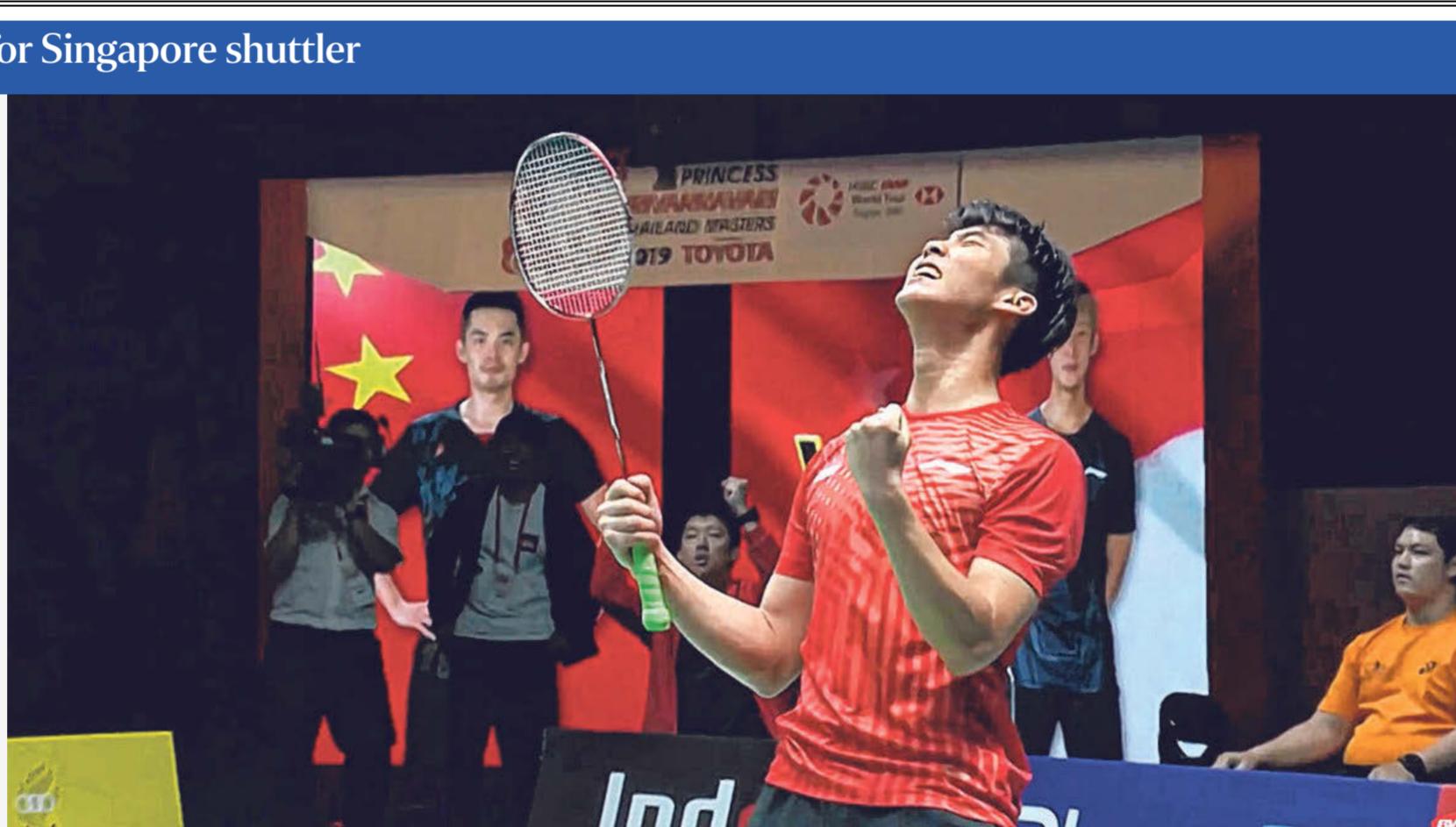
Key Myanmar dept now under civilian control

Myanmar's General Administration Department (GAD) has been transferred to a civilian-controlled government ministry, but analysts say the move at the end of last year may just be a cosmetic change for.

The powerful body continues to wield considerable military influence on everyday life, as it is run by former army personnel and forms the backbone of local bureaucracy.

The transfer has been portrayed as a milestone in Myanmar's government reform, aimed at reducing the military's involvement in politics.

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A6



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10 must-reads for today

1 Banking on crowdfunding
Start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises are increasingly turning to crowdfunding, while small-loan platforms are drawing more investors. Funding Societies, Capital Match and Capital Boost are some of the online marketplaces where groups or individuals can choose what projects to back. **BUSINESS C2**



Mr Nelson Ng Hsueh Chin borrowed about \$200,000 through Funding Societies to run his business of importing snacks. ST PHOTO: KHALID BABA

2 S'pore, KL seek to mend ties
Singapore's Foreign Ministry said yesterday that it welcomed the move by Malaysian Economic Affairs Minister Mohamed Azmin Ali to make a two-day visit here, despite the postponement of an annual bilateral meeting over a "provocative act" by the Johor chief minister. **TOP OF THE NEWS A1**

4 Indonesia election debates
The first of five public debates between rival candidates in Indonesia's presidential election will take place on Thursday, with incumbent President Joko Widodo squaring off against his challenger Prabowo Subianto to make their pitch to voters ahead of the April 17 election. **WORLD A9**

6 Lessons from 'yellow vests'
French President Emmanuel Macron is struggling to end the "yellow vest" protests. The continuing eruptions point to the dangers of broken promises by the political class to attend to social divisions, says global affairs correspondent Jonathan Eyal (below). **OPINION A15**

8 Fish prices likely to soar
Some shortages in fish supply could mean fish prices will continue to spike in the run-up to the Chinese New Year. In addition to the bump in regional demand, fishermen in countries such as Indonesia and Thailand have reported poor catches and unpredictable weather. **HOME B3**

10 Better luck in Hollywood
Asian-Australian actors say there are few roles available for them in Australia and those parts are often ancillary or based on outdated stereotypes. Many of them are heading straight to Los Angeles and succeeding, like Chris Pang in the box-office hit *Crazy Rich Asians*. **LIFE D8**

3 NUS programme expanded
Toronto and Shenzhen have been added to the list of places overseas that are part of a National University of Singapore programme to nurture entrepreneurs. Since 2002, NUS has partnered 10 overseas colleges where students in the programme take up courses and work in start-ups. **TOP OF THE NEWS A4**

5 More time for deal: Trump
United States President Donald Trump said yesterday that he was holding off on declaring a state of emergency to end the partial US government shutdown. This is to give the opposition Democrats more time to strike a deal with him amid an impasse over his demand for funding to build a US-Mexico border wall. **WORLD A14**

7 67 nabbed for vaping
Since electronic vaporisers (e-vaporisers) were outlawed in February last year, 67 people have been caught using the devices. In the last five years, another 245 have been nabbed for selling them. **HOME B2**

9 New hope for Baihakki
Veteran Singapore footballer Baihakki Khaizan (right) has joined newly promoted Trat FC, knowing that it could be his last chance to feature in the Thai League 1. The 34-year-old defender was with giants Muangthong last year but was sent on loan to second-tier side Udon Thani. **SPORT C9**



PHOTO COURTESY OF BAIHAKKI KHAIZAN

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VIDEO

How to clean like a pro

Need help cleaning some dirty household items? Professional cleaner Daphne Tan shares tips on how to make them clean and shiny again. <http://str.sg/oufQ>



VIDEO

Call of the countryside

More city slickers in Japan are drawn to rural areas by the promise of working and living in the peaceful environs of nature. Super-fast Internet speeds help, too. <http://str.sg/ouqL>

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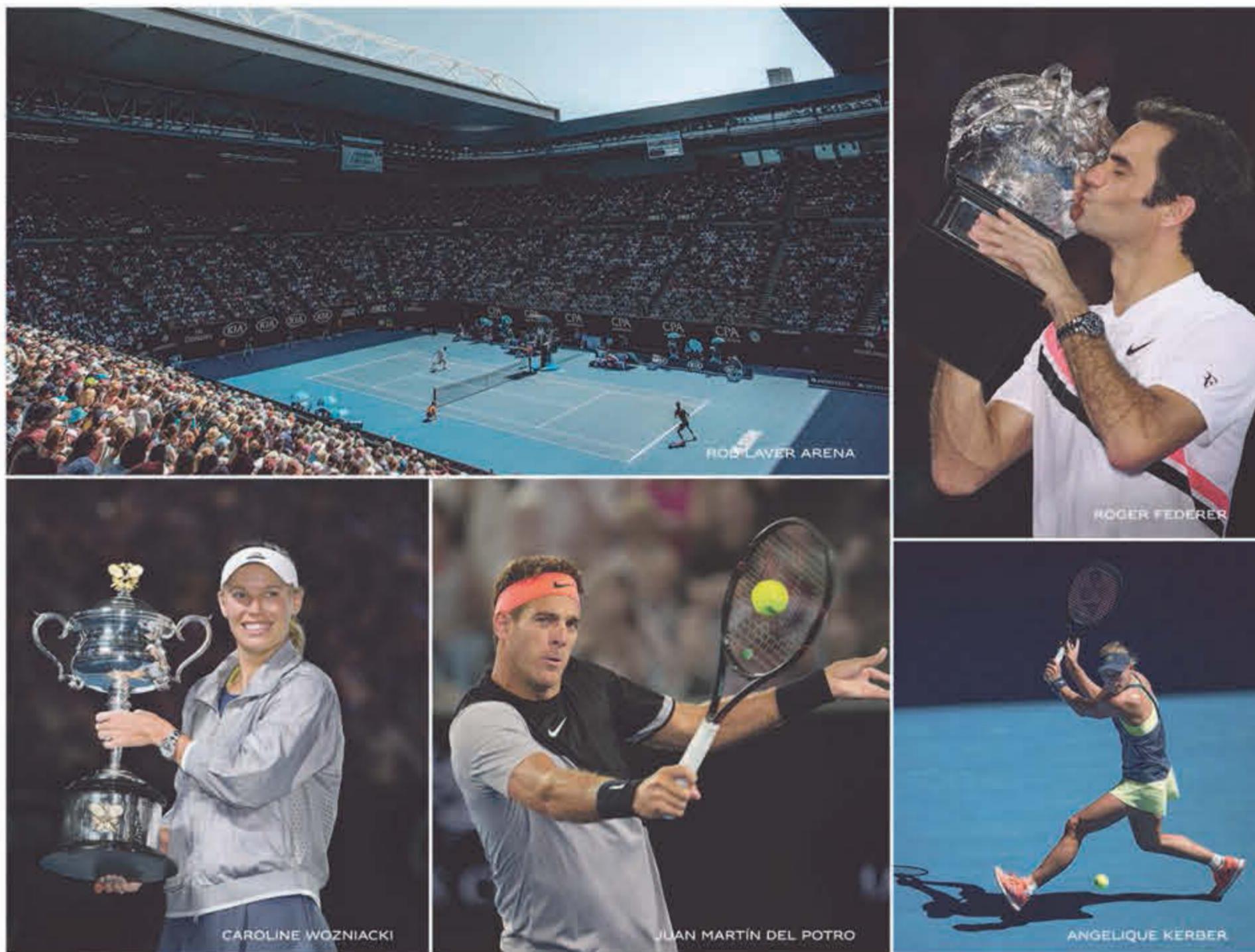
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Nearly 1,200 sq m of floor space was added to Teck Ghee CC, where new facilities include a rooftop terrace, an upgraded culinary studio and an expanded multi-purpose hall with a second-level viewing gallery. Taiji and wushu sessions will be held at the rooftop terrace, as will outdoor movie screenings and barbecue events.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong greeting children and residents taking part in a KidsRead programme at a mini library in Teck Ghee Community Club yesterday. The upgraded CC in Ang Mo Kio reopened in August last year, two years after it closed for renovation. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

PM stresses very special role played by community clubs

Govt invests heavily in them so residents will always have a place to call their second home, he says

Lim Min Zhang

Community clubs play a very special role in Singapore as they are where residents meet, make friends and bond as a community, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said at the official opening of the upgraded Teck Ghee Community Club (CC) yesterday.

This is why CCs are found in every Housing Board estate, he added.

"The Government invests heavily in building and upgrading the CCs so that residents will always have a place to call their second home," PM Lee said.

Nearly 1,200 sq m of floor space was added to Teck Ghee CC, where new facilities include a rooftop terrace, an upgraded culinary studio and an expanded multi-purpose hall with a second-level viewing gallery.

Taiji and wushu sessions will be held at the rooftop terrace, as will outdoor movie screenings and barbecue events.

The 35-year-old CC in Ang Mo

Kio, which used to have a gross floor area of 4,809 sq m, reopened in August last year, two years after it closed for renovation.

"Teck Ghee CC has been a very popular and well-used CC, but we had more and more activities and needed more space. We didn't have enough space and we couldn't accommodate all the activities we wanted to start here," said PM Lee, who is an MP for Ang Mo Kio GRC, at the event attended by more than 2,000 residents.

The Government paid for 90 per cent of the upgrading costs, with the rest raised by a committee formed to oversee this project, he added.

The People's Association manages the CCs and runs their programmes, said PM Lee, and it works hard to make sure that the activities are up-to-date, regularly refreshed, and meet the changing demands and interests of residents.

He was given a tour of the new facilities, with activities including a cookie baking session by parents and their young children at the culinary studio.

PM Lee also visited the refurbished wellness centre, which runs programmes such as "La Kopi" sessions that have provided free breakfast to the elderly from Mondays to Fridays since

November last year.

Also at yesterday's event were Mrs Lee, and the other five Ang Mo Kio GRC MPs, among them Mr Darryl David and Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar.

Retired production operator Suzie Ng, 72, who has lived in the Teck Ghee area for 23 years, welcomed the new facilities.

Madam Ng, who uses a wheelchair, said she appreciated the fact that there are now two lifts, up from one before the upgrading.

"The CC staff asked me to take part in today's inter-generational basketball shooting competition, and I did so even though I haven't played basketball in 35 years," she added.

Singapore Polytechnic student and music enthusiast Abdul Matin Muhamad Hamim, who lives in Boon Lay, goes to Teck Ghee CC a few times a month to practise with fellow musicians.

"The new CC is a quiet and good environment to practise in, and the architecture is beautiful too," said the 18-year-old, who plays the drums.

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NUS expands overseas colleges programme to Toronto, Shenzhen

Sandra Davie
Senior Education Correspondent

A National University of Singapore (NUS) programme to nurture entrepreneurs in different nodes of the world has now expanded to Toronto and Shenzhen.

The Canadian city is an artificial intelligence (AI) powerhouse, while Shenzhen is shaping up as China's version of Silicon Valley.

Since 2002, NUS has set up 10 overseas colleges, including in Silicon Valley, New York, Stockholm, Israel, Jakarta, Beijing, Shanghai, Jakarta, Lausanne in Switzerland and Munich in Germany. Students take up courses in partner universities and work in start-ups.

Professor Wong Poh Kam, who heads the NUS Entrepreneurship Centre, said the university currently has about 300 students who head to different overseas colleges

across the world yearly.

The professor in entrepreneurship and innovation strategy at NUS Business School added that the university has set up these colleges to expose its students to different kinds of industries and technologies. For example, for students heading to Munich, the aim is that they will gain engineering knowledge by working in "deep tech" start-ups based on scientific discoveries and technological innovations.

Toronto is making waves in AI, driven by the MaRS Discovery District, a 1.5 million sq ft facility that houses hundreds of start-ups across a variety of industries.

It includes Uber's first non-US facility for researching autonomous cars; Borealis AI, an academic AI research institute for the Royal Bank of Canada; and Element AI, an AI start-up incubator.

Shenzhen, said Prof Wong, was once known as the place for "copycat products". Now, though, the



In Shenzhen for the NUS Overseas Colleges programme are students (front row, from left) Chen Kai Yue; Fatim Mohrini Ahmad Mohri; Rohini Subramanian; Helen Tan Meng Zhen; and (back row from left) Aaron Ramzeen and Lim Heng Guang; and programme manager Loh Weiren. PHOTO: NUS OVERSEAS COLLEGES PROGRAMME

Chinese city has emerged as a world-class cluster for innovation.

It is at the heart of China's Silicon Delta and home to tech giants such as Huawei, ZTE and Tencent. Even Apple, the American technology giant, is building a research and development centre in Shenzhen.

Prof Wong added that it is dubbed as the "maker's dream city" as it has almost everything that one could possibly need for hardware innovation readily available, which allows for quick prototyping and rapid iteration.

As such, Shenzhen has attracted

many top tech multinational corporations, start-ups, programmers and engineers, as well as investment money.

At a steady state, about 25 to 30 NUS students will head to Toronto every year, while another 20 will head to Shenzhen.

Since 2002, more than 2,400 NUS students have benefited from an entrepreneurial education through NUS Overseas Colleges.

NUS civil engineering student Fatin Mohrini Ahmad Mohri, who headed to Shenzhen last week, said "it is the place to be" for would-be entrepreneurs.

The 21-year-old, who learnt Mandarin by watching television serials, also hopes to improve her Mandarin while she is there.

"Being in China, especially since I am not that proficient in the language, will be challenging, but it will also be a very good opportunity for me to learn to thrive in a different environment and out of my comfort zone," she said.

The third-year undergraduate will be interning at Ankeao, which provides visual marketing services to international clients.

Her role will be multi-faceted, from the coordination and production of marketing materials to client management.

Prof Wong noted that the alumni of the NUS Overseas Colleges have created more than 350 companies. He hoped that those who are sent to the various nodes of the world will return with deep technological capabilities and new ideas to translate them into commercial solutions.

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Ikhsan Fandi signs two-year deal with Norwegian club

David Lee

First Fandi Ahmad, then V. Sundram Moorthy, and now Singapore has a third local-born Lion plying his trade in Europe.

After a successful one-week trial, Ikhsan Fandi, the second son of local football legend Fandi, signed a two-year deal with Norwegian second-tier club Raufoss on Saturday.

day, making him the first Singaporean international to join a European club in 30 years.

Sundram played for Swiss side FC Basel from 1988 to 1989, while Fandi was with Dutch team Groningen from 1983 to 1985.

While Ikhsan, 19, will kick off his European sojourn with a more obscure team away from the bright lights his father was used to, the football agent who helped broker the

deal told The Straits Times Raufoss could be a useful springboard to launch his career. Mr Navjot Singh Brar said: "Ikhsan fits what Raufoss are looking for – a young striker with good potential and attitude, and we expect him to play and not just be a name on the squad list."

He was confident that if Ikhsan played well regularly, he would be talent-spotted by a larger club.

The 1.83m, 79kg forward had a

breakthrough year last year, scoring five times in eight games for Singapore from September to November, including a bicycle-kick goal in the 6-1 AFF Suzuki Cup win over Timor-Leste. He also netted eight times in 20 games for the Young Lions in the Singapore Premier League.

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SEESPORT C10



Ikhsan Fandi, son of local football legend Fandi Ahmad, is the first Singaporean international to join a European club in 30 years. The 19-year-old will play for Norwegian second-tier club Raufoss.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARIUS MYKLESET

Failure to deliver Brexit would be catastrophic for democracy: May

British PM's warning comes ahead of crucial Parliament vote on deal with EU which looks set to suffer big defeat

LONDON • British Prime Minister Theresa May warned lawmakers yesterday that failing to deliver Brexit would be catastrophic for democracy, in a plea for support two days before Parliament is expected to reject her deal with Brussels.

With the clock ticking down to its March 29 exit from the European Union and Parliament deadlocked, Britain faces a hugely uncertain path that could lead to a disorderly exit or even remaining in the bloc.

Mrs May, who postponed a vote in Parliament on her deal last month after admitting she was set to lose it, said lawmakers must not let down the people who backed Brexit in a June 2016 referendum.

"Doing so would be a catastrophic and unforgivable breach of trust in our democracy," she wrote in the Sunday Express. "So my message to Parliament this weekend is simple: it is time to forget the games and do what is right for our country."

Mrs May has so far refused to retreat from her unpopular deal, which envisages close trading ties with the EU, but without any say on policy as Britain has now.

The vexed Brexit issue represents Britain's biggest shift in foreign and trade policy in more than 40 years.

Mrs May's deal has come under fire from all sides – with opponents

of the EU seeking a cleaner break and many pro-Europeans pressing for a second referendum. Mrs May is expected to suffer a big defeat when Parliament votes tomorrow.

Brexit minister Stephen Barclay told BBC TV that persuading lawmakers to support the deal would be "challenging" but that even if it was rejected, he suspected that Parliament would ultimately support something "along the lines of this deal".

Opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn said leaving the EU without a deal would be catastrophic and his party would do everything it could to prevent that outcome. However, his priority is to force a national election and he said he would propose a vote of confidence in the government "soon" if Mrs May loses the vote.

After a week in which Parliament forced the government to promise to come back with a "Plan B" within days if Mrs May's deal is rejected, Mr Barclay said the risk of Parliament acting in a way that frustrates Brexit had increased.

The Sunday Times reported that rebel lawmakers were planning to wrest control of the legislative agenda away from Mrs May next week with a view to suspending or delaying Brexit.

Mr Vince Cable, the leader of the pro-EU Liberal Democrats, said Par-



British Prime Minister Theresa May and her husband Philip arriving at their local church in Maidenhead to attend morning prayers yesterday. Mrs May, who wrote in the Sunday Express appealing for support, said lawmakers must not let down the people who backed Brexit in a June 2016 referendum. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

liament would act to prevent a no-deal Brexit, and could ultimately seek to prevent Brexit altogether. He said this could be done by revoking Article 50, the mechanism which triggered the exit process, or by holding a second referendum.

Asked about the prospect of another referendum, Mr Corbyn told BBC TV: "My own view is that I would rather get a negotiated deal now, if we can, to stop the danger of a no-deal exit from the EU on March 29 which would be cata-

strophic for industry, catastrophic for trade."

He added that if he forced a national election and his party won, Brexit may have to be delayed while a new deal is negotiated.

REUTERS



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News analysis

Whiff of scepticism as Myanmar transfers key dept to civilian control

Transfer of military-controlled home ministry's arm called a milestone but some say it's cosmetic



Tan Hui Yee

Indochina Bureau Chief
In Yangon

A powerful government body in Myanmar changed hands as last year drew to a close. The General

Administration Department (GAD), an arm of the military-controlled Ministry of Home Affairs, was transferred to the civilian-controlled Ministry of the Office of the Union Government.

Officials have tried to portray the transfer as a milestone in longer-term efforts to reform Myanmar's unwieldy two-headed government controlled by military and civilian forces.

But some analysts have argued that the change may be more cosmetic - at least for now. It would make little difference to the fortunes of the ruling National

League for Democracy party in next year's general election, they say.

Myanmar's military-crafted Constitution grants the men in green control over key security-related ministries - defence, home affairs and border affairs. But it is the GAD that is frequently cited in discussions about the pervasive military influence in daily life.

With over 30,000 employees, the GAD is the backbone of local bureaucracy that shapes economic and social life. It collects taxes, issues licences and approves land transfers. Its regional chiefs act as the secretaries of regional governments.

And its top and mid-level positions are stacked with former military personnel.



Activists say GAD is a far-reaching informer network of military chief Min Aung Hlaing. Its transfer still leaves several military alumni in charge. PHOTO: REUTERS

Political activists allege that the GAD is a far-reaching informer network of military chief Min Aung Hlaing, whose acquiescence is needed for local bureaucracy to function under the civilian government.

Key members of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD), for example, often cite bureaucratic resistance to temper public impatience at the slow pace of reform since it won the 2015 elections.

The GAD's transfer still leaves several military alumni in charge. Last November, retired colonel Min Thu, a former air force pilot, was picked to head the Ministry of the Office of the Union Government, which was created in 2017 to speed up administration. His recently

appointed deputy is former military captain Tin Myint, who used to serve as director-general of the GAD and permanent secretary of the Home Affairs Ministry.

"The military has said it would withdraw from politics over time," Dr Naing Swe Oo, a former army captain who now heads the Thayninga Institute for Strategic Studies think-tank, tells The Straits Times.

"This may be one step in the process to give up political and administrative intervention."

Independent analyst Yan Myo Thein is more sceptical. "It's a move from 'military' to 'retired military,'" he says. "It means moving from direct control of the military to indirect control of the military."

While decades of military suppression has thinned out administrative talent among civilians, Dr Yan Myo Thein thinks the choice of ministers is more a strategy "to extend military dominance for as long as possible".

Analysts remain cautious about the difference it could actually make to the fortunes of NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, given the short runway to the next general election in 2020.

Results of the past two by-elections hint that the NLD's hold over ethnic minority areas may be slipping.

Ms Suu Kyi's government has also come under strong international pressure for shielding the military which has been accused of ethnic cleansing in Rakhine state.

With the lingering threat of sanctions and a lack of pace of banking reforms, Myanmar will likely see its economy slow to 6.4 per cent in the year ending Sept 31, compared with 6.8 per cent in the previous period, said the International Monetary Fund last month.

Even if the transfer was the first step of genuine change, it could take years to overhaul the entire institution, said Sandhi Governance Institute director Khine Win.

"But at least the NLD government can start the process of replacing former military officers with civilians," he said. "We cannot change things overnight, but at least this department will become more civilian."

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Children studying at a madrasah in the camp for Rohingya in New Delhi. All the 240 or so refugees in the camp are registered with the UNHCR but they still worry they may be the next to be sent back to Myanmar.

ST PHOTOS:
DEBARSHI
DASGUPTA

Rohingya in India rattled by growing fears of deportation

Debarshi Dasgupta
India Correspondent
In New Delhi

Children rock back and forth as they pore over the Quran at the madrasah or Islamic school. A woman haggles with an itinerant vendor selling blankets.

It is much like any other day at this camp for Rohingya refugees in India's capital.

But this belies a growing fear among its residents - among the estimated 40,000 Rohingya Muslims in India - who worry they may be next to be sent back to Myanmar.

This sense of foreboding comes as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government brandishes its strong-handed approach on illegal migrants ahead of parliamentary elections due in three months.

India deported a couple and their three children on Jan 3 despite concerns about their safety in Myanmar. The family of five, registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), had been jailed in north-eastern Assam state since 2013 for entering India without valid documents.

They were the second batch of Rohingya to be deported since last October, when India repatriated seven Rohingya men.

The UNHCR, in a statement on Jan 4, said it "regrets" India's decision

to repatriate the family, adding that it has not been given, despite repeated requests, "access to individuals in detention to ascertain their circumstances and to assess the voluntariness of their return".

India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and treats Rohingya in the country as illegal migrants. Many of these asylum-seekers enter India by sneaking past its border control authorities from neighbouring Bangladesh.

India's Border Security Force arrested about 478 Rohingya along the border with Bangladesh from 2015 to 2018, with 230 held in the first 11 months of last year.

Around 18,000 of the Rohingya in India are registered with the UNHCR, which issues them ID cards meant to help them avoid arrest, detention and deportation.

But this brings little comfort - or reassurance - at the camp, where all its 240 or so refugees are registered with the UNHCR.

"We are living with a growing fear of being deported to Myanmar," Mr Mohammed Bashir Ahmad, 35, said when The Straits Times visited the camp last week.

"What is the point of sending us back when conditions that forced us to flee remain the same? We want to go back but not with the way things are."

Adding to their fears, the long-term visas of many Rohingya have



Mr Mohammed Bashir Ahmad (left), seen with fellow refugee Abdullah at the Rohingya camp in New Delhi, says they are living with a growing fear of being deported to Myanmar. The long-term visas of many have not been renewed.

40K
Estimated number of
Rohingya Muslims in India.

also not been renewed by the Indian government.

BJP president Amit Shah has vowed to deport all illegal migrants, whom he likened to "termites" at a rally in September. When the government began collecting biometric details of Rohingya across the country after the seven men were sent back last October, many Rohingya fled to Bangladesh.

"They are fleeing to Bangladesh as they can at least survive there instead of going back to Myanmar where they face the risk of being

short of citizenship.

"With this document, they cannot vote or move freely outside their villages and will not have other rights enjoyed by Myanmar citizens," he said. "If India must deport us, send us to any other country but not Myanmar."

Though India is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, Ms Meenakshi Ganguly, the South Asia director of Human Rights Watch, argued that it is still bound by customary international law based on shared principles of humanity that require states to protect individuals, including by not forcibly returning them to a place where they are at risk of torture and even death.

"What has been happening against them in Myanmar has been deemed as a crime against humanity by the United Nations. It is a very serious situation. In this environment where Myanmar has not yet accepted any responsibility for these crimes or prosecuted anybody, India should not be sending people back to the same situation," she told The Straits Times.

Ms Ganguly said India could have addressed the concerns that arise from the presence of Rohingya in the country "in a different manner rather than support the rhetoric that every Rohingya is a terrorist".

"Are all 40,000 of them terrorists? This is clearly not the case. It is the responsibility of the state to protect people, not place them at risk," she said.

"Unfortunately many in India have been making wild allegations about Rohingya refugees and the state has done nothing to correct this ill-informed discourse."

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Children's theme park? No, it's the new paediatric centre at NUH



Above: Soft toys in the dressing room, which also has a nursing room, on level seven of the NUHkids Specialist Centre.

Right: The reception area of level seven, which has a savannah theme. It is among three themed floors where consulting rooms are located, and all three also have an outdoor playground. ST PHOTOS: JASMINE CHOONG



Felicia Choo

With its playgrounds, colourful design and pictures of animals, the new paediatric centre at the National University Hospital (NUH) can be easily mistaken for a children's theme park.

But that is exactly the intention behind the NUHkids Specialist Centre, which opens to the public today.

The new building, which has 10 storeys, brings together all the hospital's outpatient paediatric services under one roof, with a design that incorporates nature and science.

The centre also has a one-queue system, in which patients get a ticket with one queue number for their entire day's appointments.

"We wanted to make the experience of going to the hospital pleasant and comfortable, as well as easy to navigate, for the child, family and caregivers," said Associate Professor Daniel Goh, chair of the Khoo Teck Puat-National University Children's Medical Institute.

The institute currently manages close to 80,000 outpatient visits a year, with an average annual growth of 6 per cent for the past five years.

With the new paediatric centre, the institute will have a potential capacity to handle about 110,000 outpatient visits annually.

The three floors where the consultation rooms are located all have a theme – rainforest, savannah or Arctic – and each floor has an outdoor playground.

NUH also roped in partners, such as Science Centre Singapore, which provided interactive exhibits on the three themed floors, and Wildlife Reserves Singapore, which will showcase wildlife images and educational information.

Swedish furniture giant Ikea has also furnished the breastfeeding rooms and rehabilitation centre, while Swiss flavours and fragrances company Givaudan designed subtle scents to complement the theme on each floor.

The centre, which is located beside the paediatric wards, houses medical, nursing and clinical support services, including art therapy, dietetics and rehabilitation.

Previously, these services were spread out across the NUH campus. However, sub-specialty services that require special equipment and procedures – such as those for the eye, ear, nose and throat, dental services and cancer treatment – will remain in their respective clinics in the hospital.

With a capacity of 3,650 sq m, the centre also allowed for expanded services, such as the Paediatric Feeding and Nutrition Clinic.

The clinic now comes with a kitchenerette and an observatory room with a one-way mirror that allows doctors and parents to discreetly observe the child's interaction with the therapist.

In addition, there are improved workflow processes, such as having two or three service associates in a group of clinics, instead of one in each clinic, said Prof Goh.

There are still more services to come, with the diabetes and orthopaedic clinics opening from the second quarter of this year.

Two of the floors – levels nine and 10 – have been left vacant for future expansion.

The centre was constructed taking into account feedback from parents and children.

It was funded from a \$50 million donation from the Estate of Khoo Teck Puat in 2010, and took two years to build, from 2016 to last year.

It took over the site of the former radiotherapy centre, which has moved to the medical centre.

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There are still more services to come, with the diabetes and orthopaedic clinics opening from the second quarter of this year. Two of the floors – levels nine and 10 – have been left vacant for future expansion.

Khashoggi killing: Pompeo to seek accountability

He will ask Saudi Crown Prince to ensure that the journalist's killers are held accountable



to preserve the alliance with the kingdom, although the US Senate has clearly blamed Prince Mohammed for the murder.

Washington is eager for regional unity to gain widespread support for its fight against Iran. Mr Pompeo yesterday refused to comment on reports that Washington had recently considered military action against Teheran.

He also called on Qatar and other Gulf countries to end the worst political rift in the region for years, which has seen Doha diplomatically and economically isolated by neighbouring former allies for the past 19 months. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt – all US allies – cut ties with Qatar in June 2017, accusing it of supporting terrorist groups and seeking closer ties with Saudi arch-rival Iran.

Qatar – also a US ally – denies the allegations and accuses the countries of seeking regime change.

"As for the GCC... we are all more powerful when we're working together when we have common challenges in the region and around the world," Mr Pompeo said, referring to the six member nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Washington, which at first appeared to back the boycott of Qatar, has so far been unsuccessful in trying to end the dispute. Attempts at mediation have stalled, as highlighted by the recent resignation of US envoy Anthony Zinni.

For Washington, turning the page on the crisis is essential for the successful launch of the Middle East Strategic Alliance, which is a Nato-style security pact that includes Gulf countries as well as Egypt and Jordan.

The US and Qatar held their second "strategic dialogue" yesterday, and signed agreements on defence, education and culture.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DOHA • US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he will ask Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to ensure the killers of journalist Jamal Khashoggi are held accountable for their crime.

The top United States diplomat, on an extensive Middle East tour, spoke ahead of a politically sensitive visit to Saudi Arabia, which has faced intense international scrutiny over Mr Khashoggi's murder inside its Istanbul consulate.

"We will continue to have a conversation with the Crown Prince and the Saudis about ensuring the accountability is full and complete with respect to the unacceptable murder of Jamal Khashoggi," Mr Pompeo told reporters at a press conference in Qatar yesterday.

"So, we'll continue to talk about that and make sure we have all the facts so that they are held accountable, certainly by the Saudis, but by the United States as well."

Mr Pompeo was due to travel to Saudi Arabia later yesterday as part of an eight-day trip to Amman, Cairo, Manama, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Riyadh, Muscat and, finally, Kuwait City.

He was speaking to journalists in Doha after meeting his Qatari counterpart, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani. He will meet the Qatari Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, before heading to Saudi Arabia.

On a previous visit to Riyadh at the height of the Khashoggi affair, Mr Pompeo's broad smiles with the Crown Prince caused outrage among some Americans.

However, US President Donald Trump has said Washington wants

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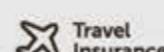
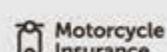
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Birds that a man tried to smuggle into Singapore on Dec 21. Dogs, cats and birds are the three most common smuggled non-exotic pet animals. PHOTO: AGRI-FOOD AND VETERINARY AUTHORITY



Facebook posts advertising a toy poodle and a munchkin cat for sale. Importing animals without an AVA permit is illegal and carries a maximum penalty of \$10,000 and a jail term of up to one year. Buyers who opt for smuggled pets might also end up with sickly and poorly bred animals.

PHOTOS: SCREENSHOTS FROM FACEBOOK

Smuggling cases turn spotlight on the underground pet trade

Three attempts foiled in less than a month; welfare groups fear more may be getting past checkpoints

Cara Wong and Lim Min Zhang

Crammed into tight spaces and deprived of food and water, they are hidden in vehicles and driven across the Causeway from Malaysia.

Sometimes, they are even drugged as they make the journey in the deep of night or early in the morning to maximise the odds of getting into Singapore illegally.

Making this treacherous journey are prized pets such as dogs, cats and birds that are delivered surreptitiously to their new owners here.

These animals are smuggled in as their Singapore owners want to pay less for them, skip the necessary health checks and paperwork or even land their hands on breeds not available here.

This underground pet trade has come under the spotlight as the authorities recently foiled three cases in less than a month.

They foiled an attempt to smuggle 12 puppies on Dec 11, and caught another man with 40 birds on Dec 21. In another case, a man stuffed four live kittens down his trousers in a misguided attempt to bring the animals across the Causeway on Jan 2.

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) said last week in response to queries from The Straits

Times that there were 12 cases of smuggling involving non-exotic pet animals last year. There were 10 cases in 2017, and 13 in 2016.

The top three most common smuggled non-exotic pet animals – referring to animals that the AVA allows owners to keep as pets here – are dogs, cats and birds.

But animal welfare groups said it is likely that more smugglers make it past the checkpoints undetected.

When ST posed as buyers to speak to sellers who claimed they could bring in puppies from Malaysia, one Malaysian seller claimed he has smuggled more than 80 puppies across the border since he started selling his puppies about six years ago.

Another seller offered to sell a Malaysia-bred mini Pomeranian for \$800, with an additional \$1,300 to deliver it in Singapore. Local retailers can sell the same breed for more than \$4,000.

The seller, known as Ms Tan, said she has sent over dogs – "too many to count" – to Singapore through an agent, who takes home the \$1,300 delivery charge.

She said she sends the puppies over illegally as "the legal way is too complicated".

Other sellers from Malaysia said their middlemen can charge around \$400 to \$600 for bringing in a single pet to Singapore.

All four sellers ST spoke to did not elaborate on how the pets are shipped in, but said they would be delivered safely.

Customers may be offered refunds or exchanges if their pets die while being transported, according

Foiled attempts

DEC 11, 2018

An Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) officer foiled an attempt by a 25-year-old Singaporean man to smuggle 12 puppies through Tuas Checkpoint. Three puppies eventually died.

APRIL 2018

A man named Sudrak Naum, who drove a Malaysia-registered tour bus that carried 12 live birds, was sentenced to eight months' jail, including three months for abetting animal cruelty.

ICA officers found the birds in 10 boxes concealed in a compartment of the tour bus at Woodlands Checkpoint on Feb 26 last year, with eight birds found dead.

JUNE 2017

A Malaysian man, Ravichandran

Muthusamy, was sentenced to 30 weeks' jail for smuggling 11 puppies into Singapore in March 2017. ICA officers found the dogs hidden in a modified fuel tank in the car he drove at Woodlands Checkpoint, with no food or water and limited space for them to move.

The court heard that he was commissioned to smuggle the puppies for someone in Singapore, and was instructed to drive into the country with them.

NOVEMBER 2014

Singaporean Herman Rahmat was jailed for three months for smuggling in 12 birds from Vietnam. He hid them in PVC tubes in one of his luggage bags, and they were discovered at Changi Airport. The birds were found alive, but eight died within three days.

AVA permit is illegal and carries a maximum penalty of \$10,000 and a jail term of up to one year.

Such smuggling is motivated by high prices of pedigree pets here.

Pet lovers say certain breeds of pure-bred puppies and kittens can fetch more than \$6,000 here. They include labradoodles – a mix between a labrador and a poodle – and Bengal cats.

Smugglers thus see an opportunity to try to undercut the market, said Action for Singapore Dogs (ASD) president Ricky Yeo.

India's Amaravati smart city project a launchpad for S'pore firms

Grace Leong
Business Correspondent

For Singapore-based Cuted Group, the opportunity to help build the new capital city of Amaravati, India's first smart city, in southern Andhra Pradesh state, represents a new lifeline.

This comes as the offshore marine engineering firm has been diversifying into refinery testing and inspections, solar and water treatment services and even organic chicken farming, as local shipyards – which used to be its main revenue source – suffered a long hard winter after oil prices tanked in 2014.

Through the Amaravati project, Singapore companies can use Andhra Pradesh as a launchpad to access the wider South India region, as well as its regional linkages to the rest of South Asia, the Middle East and Africa, said Singapore Business Federation (SBF) chief executive officer Ho Meng Kit.

The Ministry of Trade and Indus-

try said: "Amaravati provides opportunities for Singapore companies in urban infrastructure and smart solutions to pilot and scale their solutions... There has been increasing interest from Singapore companies, particularly in construction and smart urban solutions."

Access to South India and its linkages
Amaravati provides opportunities for Singapore companies in urban infrastructure and smart solutions to pilot and scale their solutions... There has been increasing interest from Singapore companies, particularly in construction and smart urban solutions.

MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

growth of 11.22 per cent in 2017-18, way above the national average of 6.6 per cent.

The state will have 14 ports by 2029, up from one major port and five minor ports currently, providing Singapore companies with logistical networks to the rest of India.

It is what Mr Arunachalam needs. "Amaravati also produces a lot of agricultural products – millet, chillies and rice that I can buy, pack and export to Singapore and the Middle East," he said.

Singapore has been collaborating with India, which is trying to upgrade

basic infrastructure, and using information and digital technology to improve the quality of public services in 100 cities. Already, it is helping Andhra Pradesh build Amaravati.

Singapore's Ascendas-Singbridge and Sembcorp Development are the master developers for the 6.84 sq km stretch, which will be the capital's commercial core.

To deepen economic links, plans are under way by the Andhra Pradesh-Singapore Business Council, anchored by SBF and the Confederation of Indian Industry, to facilitate more partnerships in Andhra Pradesh between Indian and Singapore companies. To that end, SBF has launched the Sunrise Programme, which aims to help 1,200 Singapore firms secure projects in the Indian state.

Mr Shabbir Hassanbhai, co-chair of the Andhra Pradesh-Singapore Business Council at SBF, noted that \$14 billion worth of infrastructure opportunity has been identified in road infrastructure, water supply, power distribution,

flood management and waterways, among other things".

"This is the first smart city project in India, and could be a showcase of what Singapore can bring to the table, and encourage other states in India to look at this model... The feedback from some Singapore firms is that they are quite bullish, but there are questions on how much can be translated into actual business," he said.

"We've had our first meeting and identified areas of cooperation for India and Singapore. Now we have to identify the Singapore companies and what projects we can undertake," he added.

For Mr Arunachalam, who is looking to invest between US\$1 million (\$S1.35 million) and US\$5 million, the biggest bugbear is high land cost.

"The government has said it is allocating land for SMEs but it's not finalised yet. The (state assembly) elections are coming so (Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu) Naidu is now concentrating on building housing projects for the poor," he said.

"I'm a small guy. I have to wait for my turn to come, and it may come after the elections."

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WORLD

President Joko Widodo (left in picture) and his challenger, Mr Prabowo Subianto, will be looking to win over swing voters when the two men face off on TV on Thursday, said analysts. PHOTO: THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



Indonesia's first election debate to air on Thursday

Jokowi and rival Prabowo to field questions on law, human rights, terrorism and graft

Francis Chan
Indonesia Bureau Chief
In Jakarta

Indonesian President Joko Widodo and his challenger, Mr Prabowo Subianto, will face off on Thursday in the first of five public debates to make their pitch to voters, particularly the undecided, ahead of the 2019 election.

This first debate is expected to set the tone for the rest of the campaign before voters head to the polls on April 17, experts say.

It will see Mr Joko, popularly

called Jokowi, and Mr Prabowo, together with their running mates – senior cleric Ma'ruf Amin and businessman Sandiaga Uno respectively – fielding questions on law, human rights, terrorism and corruption.

Mr Joko has been tough on terror and graft, but as the sitting president, he will no doubt have to address last Wednesday's attack and bomb threat against two senior anti-graft officials as well as questions on his human rights record.

The other team, on the other hand, will need to show it has solutions to improve the current administration's showing on the same is-

sues, say political strategists.

But foremost on the candidates' minds on Thursday will be to swing votes over to their side ahead of what is looking increasingly to be a tight race to the Istana, they add.

Gadjah Mada University political analyst Kuskrishno Ambardi, the co-author of *Voting Behavior In Indonesia Since Democratization*, said about a fifth of 193 million eligible voters are still undecided, and their support could go either way.

"But generally, these swing voters will not gravitate together to support just one side," Dr Kuskrishno said. "Usually, they will be spread between the two pairings and one will have a slight edge."

Indonesian Institute of Sciences political researcher Nostalgian Wahyudhi agrees that swing voters

will be the key target audience of the candidates during the debate.

"And these are dominated by millennials," he told The Straits Times, referring to the 80 million young Indonesians who are set to vote, many for the first time, in April.

These younger voters, however, are said to be the most disenchanted with the political establishment, and attempts to secure their support has proven to be tough.

Public debates have become a key feature of hustings in Indonesia since the country first held direct elections in 2004.

This year, the two pairs of candidates will face each other at the first and last of the five debates.

Mr Joko will go head-to-head against Mr Prabowo – a retired general who was his rival at the 2014 election – on Feb 17 and March 30, while their running mates will do the same on March 17.

The fifth and final debate will be held before the mandated cooling off period which starts on April 14.

Other issues the candidates will cross swords over at subsequent debates include the economy, defence, infrastructure development, healthcare, education, and other bread-and-butter issues.

The General Elections Commission (KPU) came under fire recently after it decided to share the list of questions with the candidates ahead of the first debate. KPU chairman Arief Budiman said it

would allow candidates to be better prepared and more thorough in their responses. He added that the debate format would still see candidates being asked questions they have no prior knowledge of.

Some observers told The Straits Times that while debates add excitement to the hustings and offer candidates a chance to win over undecided voters, its real impact on the final electoral result will only be felt if the gap between the two camps narrows as the race unfolds.

"A superior performance at the debates may give the candidates an advantage only if the difference in the polls is, for example, about two to three percentage points," said Dr Kuskrishno.

Most surveys still have Mr Joko and Dr Ma'ruf ahead of Mr Prabowo and Mr Sandiaga, although some recent polling data show the gap narrowing.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies research fellow Alexander Arifianto said compared with Mr Prabowo, President Joko has leveraged his position as the incumbent to marshal support from more political parties, regional executives, retired military officers and influential notables.

"However, evidence on the ground indicates this election will be much closer than what most pollsters and pundits have anticipated."

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Given the potential for disasters in the country, it's time to have disaster education as part of the national curriculum.

INDONESIAN PRESIDENT JOKO WIDODO, on disaster training for schoolchildren. **ATI**

Jokowi challenger moots tax cuts to stimulate economy

JAKARTA • Indonesian presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto is proposing deep tax cuts to stimulate South-east Asia's largest economy, copying the playbook successfully used by US President Donald Trump.

Mr Prabowo and his running mate, Mr Sandiaga Uno, will lower company and individual taxes by between 5 and 8 percentage points over five years and widen the tax-to-gross domestic product ratio to at least 16 per cent from about 11 per cent, according to Mr Anthony Budawan, an economist advising the pair's campaign.

Lower taxes will lead to greater compliance and allow the government to cut borrowings to fund its budget, he said.

The economy has taken centre stage in Indonesia's presidential election campaign, with Mr Prabowo targeting incumbent Joko Widodo's policy of adding to record government debt to finance building roads, ports and dams worth billions.

The swelling of government debt and its high foreign ownership were factors in a market sell-off last year, which saw the rupiah tumble to levels not seen since the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis.

Indonesia now has a top personal income tax rate of 30 per cent and a corporate tax rate of 25 per cent.

Mr Prabowo is taking on Mr Joko in a rematch of the 2014 election, which he narrowly lost.

The former general has picked Mr Sandiaga, a former private equity investor, and has blamed the high public debt and slump in the currency as examples of Mr Joko's mismanagement of the economy.

Mr Joko, who came into office promising to deliver annual growth of 7 per cent, is set to miss the target by a wide margin as the economy has expanded at about 5 per cent during his tenure. But he enjoys a lead of 20 percentage points in opinion polls over Mr Prabowo, after creating millions of new jobs and spending billions to add roads, ports and airports to cut logistic costs in the archipelago.

BLOOMBERG

Kelantan prince's ex-wife running for legislative seat

Arlina Arshad
Regional Correspondent

Former Indonesian model Manohara Odelia Pinot, who made international headlines in 2009 for escaping in Singapore from her Malaysian prince-husband for alleged physical abuse, is running as a legislative candidate in Indonesia's April election.

She was only 16 in 2008 when she married Tengku Muhammad Fakhry Petra, the younger brother of Sultan Muhammad V, the Kelantan monarch who unexpectedly abdicated on Jan 6 after just two years as Malaysia's king.

The palace has not said why the constitutional monarch, 49, had stepped down, but it came after weeks of speculation that he had married former Miss Moscow 2015, Ms Oksana Voevodina.

It is not unusual for commoners to marry Malaysian royalty, but life in the palace remains closely guarded.

Ms Manohara, in a telephone interview with The Straits Times last Tuesday, declined to comment on her life in the Kelantan palace or Sultan Muhammad V's abdication.

She would only say: "Kings are like ordinary people, some are good, some are bad... just because I had a bad experience with one does not mean all are like that."

Ms Manohara, now 27, was referring to her ex-husband, Tengku Fakhry, whom she claimed had held her captive and abused her at the palace in Kubang Kerian, in the Kelantan capital of Kota Bharu.

She made her dramatic escape from a hotel in Singapore in June 2009 while accompanying her then father-in-law and Kelantan sultan Ismail Petra Shah II for medical treatment.

Ms Manohara and Tengku Fakhry first met at a Malaysian tourism event in Jakarta in 2006.

Tengku Fakhry filed a defamation suit against Ms Manohara and her mother, Ms Daisy Fajarina, over the allegations of abuse and was awarded RM6 million (around S\$2 million) in damages from the Kuala Lumpur High Court in 2010.

Ms Manohara told The Straits Times she wants to leave the dark chapter of her life behind.

She said: "It happened. I believe that everything happens for a reason and that has shaped me to be who I am today."



Ms Manohara, whose father is American and mother an Indonesian, said she is now stronger and more empathetic. She said: "When I see people need-

ing help, and having been in a position where I desperately needed help, as much as I can, I will help."

A decade on, she has set up a publishing company, Tiga Meja

NO GRUDGES

People keep getting the wrong idea, thinking that I despise Malaysia, that I hate Malaysia. It's not about Malaysia, it's about that one specific individual. It had nothing to do with the whole country.

MS MANOHARA ODELIA PINOT, on bearing no grudges against the country and its people.

Ms Manohara Odelia Pinot in a picture also featuring President Joko Widodo (far left) and NasDem chairman Surya Paloh. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/MANOHARA ODELIA PINOT

Kreasi, focusing on corporate magazines. She is active in humanitarian relief work as well as animal conservation and wildlife protection.

She joined NasDem party last

year in the hope of making a difference in a country where "concern for animals and the environment is very much lacking".

NasDem is a member of the ruling coalition backing the current administration and re-election of President Joko Widodo in the upcoming election.

She is expected to run as a legislative candidate in the electoral districts of Surabaya and Sidoarjo. She said she was inspired by the stellar performance of former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, more popularly known as Ahok.

She said: "I had no interest in politics until Ahok came along. We got an example of how things could be done right."

She said she has a boyfriend now, but "marriage is not something in the near future yet".

She has not returned to Malaysia and has no plans to do so, but stressed that she bears no grudge against the country and its people.

"It's not about Malaysia, it's about that one specific individual. It had nothing to do with the whole country," she said.

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Trump suggests Vietnam for summit: Report

N. Korea said to be reviewing the idea, says Japanese newspaper

SEOUL • US President Donald Trump suggested holding the anticipated second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Vietnam in mid-February, a Japanese newspaper said yesterday.

The Yomiuri Shimbun, citing officials familiar with the matter, reported that North Korea appeared to have reviewed the US proposal

but had not yet given a response.

The report comes amid rising speculation that the two leaders are soon to hold the second summit to resume the stalled talks on denuclearisation following their first meeting in Singapore in June last year.

Mr Trump had previously confirmed that talks on the location of the second summit with Mr Kim were under way and that they are to announce it in the "not-too-distant future".

Mr Kim, in his New Year's speech, had also expressed his willingness

to meet Mr Trump again "at any time".

For the second meeting, Vietnam, Singapore and Hawaii had been mentioned as possible venues for the bilateral summit.

But experts thought Vietnam and Singapore held higher possibilities as they have North Korean embassies, while Hawaii does not.

Vietnam reportedly has delivered messages to both South and North Korea that it wishes to host the envisioned summit in its resort town of Danang.

Former officials of the US government that worked on the North Korean issue have also expected the second US-North Korea summit to happen soon, but they also expressed doubts on whether the two would be able to reach an agreement.

The nuclear talks have failed to advance after the first summit last year due to differences in their stance on denuclearisation.

While the US insists that North Korea takes more concrete action towards denuclearisation and submits a list of its nuclear weapons, Pyongyang demands reciprocal gestures, such as easing

economic sanctions.

In an interview with Radio Free Asia (RFA), a US news outlet, last Friday, former US nuclear negotiator with North Korea, Mr Robert Gallucci, said the second summit is likely to take place at the end of this month or next.

Another former US envoy expressed scepticism as to whether progress would come from the envisioned summit.

"The two leaders of the United States and North Korea will shake hands, have dinner banquets and hold a summit like they did in the Singapore summit," Mr Robert King, the US former special envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues told RFA. But a practical outcome is not expected, he added.

"The two leaders of the United States and North Korea will shake hands, have dinner banquets and hold a summit like they did in the Singapore summit," Mr Robert King, the US former special envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues told RFA. But a practical outcome is not expected, he added.

nal denuclearisation," he said in an interview with Fox News last Friday.

"I don't think there has been a single variant from the core proposition, which is the fully denuclearised North Korea as verified by international experts, (which) is the objective of this administration. We intend to achieve that," said Mr Pompeo. THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Pig-related products fly off shelves in China for CNY

BEIJING • With the Year of the Pig just weeks away, pig-related products have become a popular item on Chinese people's shopping lists for celebrating the upcoming Spring Festival.

On China's biggest online consumer shopping platform, Taobao, products inspired by the British animated show Peppa Pig are very popular among people looking for stylish ways to celebrate Chinese New Year.

There are hundreds of shops selling all kinds of Peppa Pig-inspired items, including toys, necklaces, bracelets, piggy banks, backpacks and red envelopes.

At the Peppa Pig flagship shop in T-mall, more than 400 golden Peppa Pig piggy banks were sold

last month for 219 yuan (S\$44) each.

Around 200 people pre-ordered the piggy banks for 169 yuan during a special sale.

About 9,000 Peppa Pig toys were sold at the store last month, with prices ranging from 29 yuan to 329 yuan.

More than 3,800 Peppa Pig backpacks for children were sold last month at one store and dozens of people bought golden Peppa Pig necklaces costing around 1,500 yuan each at another store.

Peppa Pig-related products are so popular that employees at eight stores declined to be interviewed because they were busy with customers.

Ms Zou Henguan, who was born

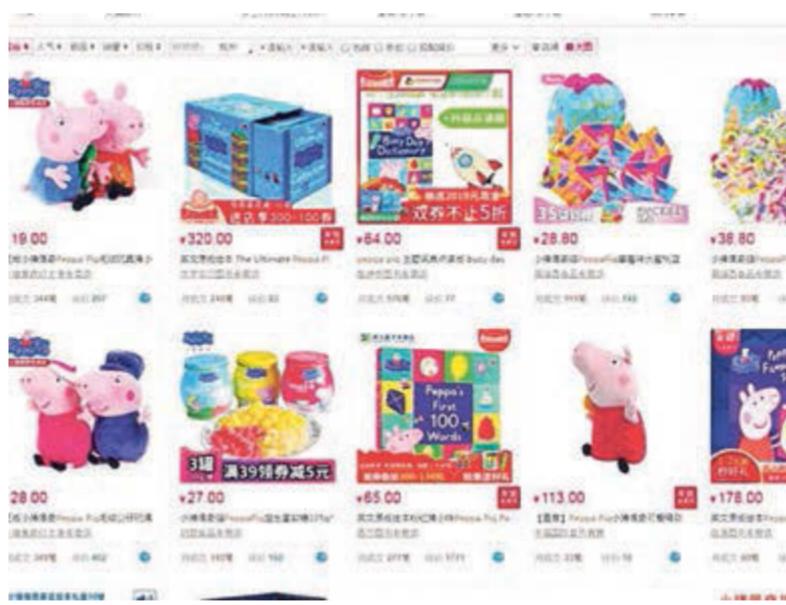
in 1983, also a Year of the Pig, bought a braided red bracelet with an image of the show's main character, Peppa, on Taobao.

"Chinese people believe you should wear something red during the zodiac year in which you were born, to fend off potential accidents. I hope the red bracelet will keep me safe and sound in 2019," she said.

In Chinese culture, pigs are a symbol of wealth, and their chubby faces and big ears are not only cute but also signs of good fortune, she said.

Local pigs have also won people's hearts.

When China Post issued a set of special zodiac stamps for Chinese



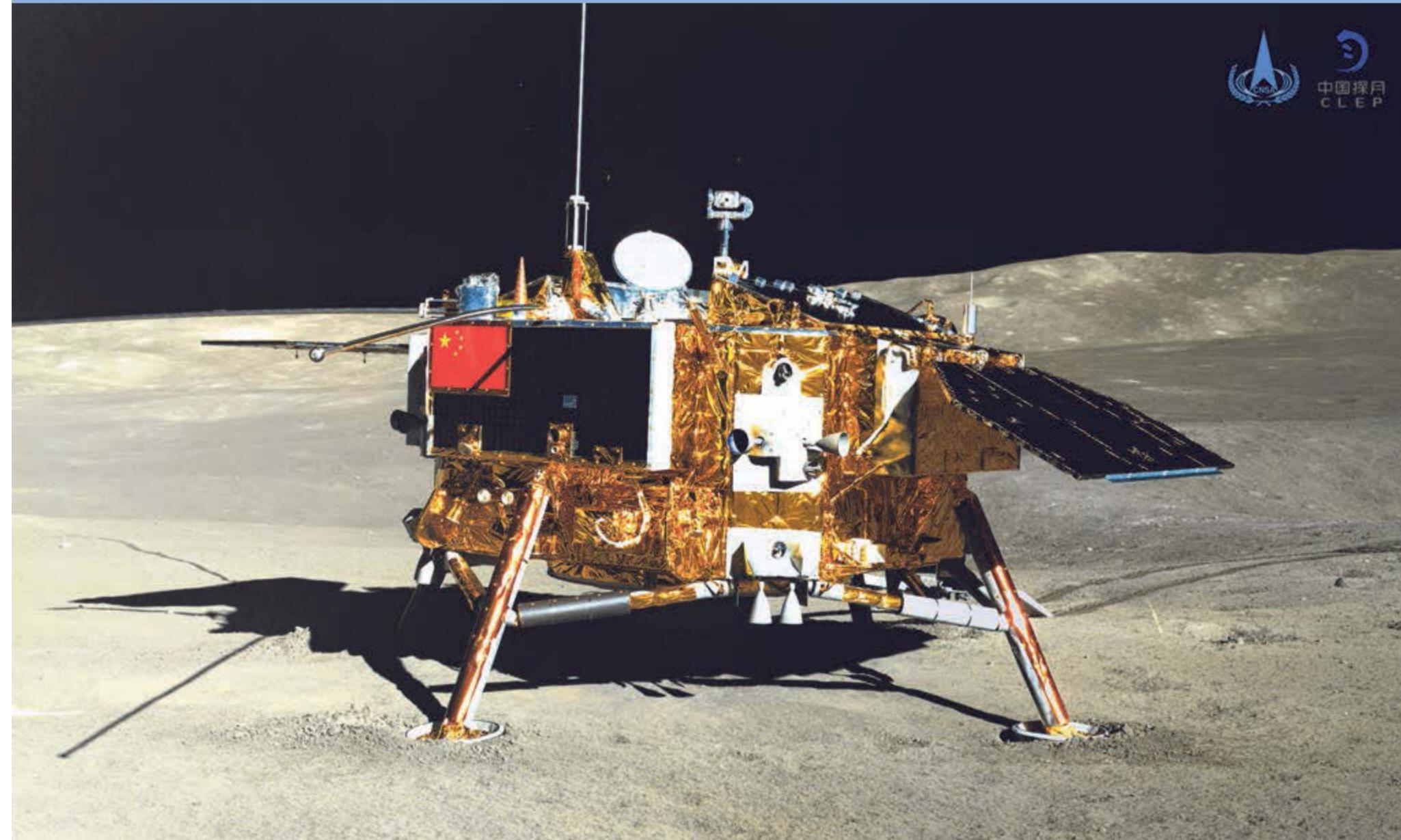
Products inspired by the British animated show Peppa Pig are very popular on shopping lists of Chinese New Year items. PHOTO: TAOBAO.COM

New Year on Jan 5, some Beijing collectors waited overnight or longer at post offices to be the first to get their hands on the stamps.

Hong Kong Post has also planned

to issue a set of special zodiac stamps with gilding and silk decorations to commemorate the Chinese New Year. CHINA DAILY/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

China's probe to measure Moon's temperatures



Night on the Moon is dark and cold, but Chinese scientists do not yet know exactly how cold it can be. The Chang'e-4 probe, which landed on the far side of the Moon on Jan 3 and is seen here in a China National Space Administration photo taken by lunar rover Yutu 2 last Friday, will help the researchers measure the Moon's temperatures. A lunar day equals 14 days on Earth, and a lunar night is the same length. Scientists estimate that the highest temperature during the day might reach 127 deg C, while the lowest at night could fall to minus 183 deg C. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Beijing to tackle trade row with US this year: Minister

BEIJING • China will work to tackle trade friction with the United States this year, China's Commerce Minister Zhong Shan said in an interview with state media that followed three days of talks between the nations and perked up troubled financial markets.

The Ministry of Commerce, which has set trade negotiations as one of its priorities this year, will push talks forward and boost cooperation with US states, cities, busi-

ness communities and non-governmental groups in order to promote a stable bilateral trade relationship, state news agency Xinhua reported, citing an interview Mr Zhong granted to it and a number of other Chinese agencies.

Talks between mid-level US and Chinese officials in Beijing concluded last Wednesday.

The negotiations were extended for a day, which added to optimism fuelled by recent tweets from US

President Donald Trump that the two sides are making progress towards an agreement.

US and Chinese stocks have advanced in the early days of this year on fresh hope for a breakthrough in the showdown between the world's two largest economies.

There are about seven weeks before the US-imposed deadline for a deal, after which Mr Trump may order a resumption of tariff hikes on imports from China.

The US President is increasingly eager to strike a deal with China in an effort to perk up financial markets that have slumped on concerns over the trade war, according to people familiar with internal White House deliberations.

Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He, a key economic adviser to Chinese President Xi Jinping, is set to visit Washington late this month for further trade talks, people familiar with the plans said last Friday.

Mr Liu would meet US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, the sources said.

Separately, Mr Zhong told Xinhua that China's goods consumption grew by around 9.1 per cent last year to 38 trillion yuan (\$7.6 trillion), and inbound foreign direct investment increased by 3 per cent last year to US\$135 billion (\$183 billion).

Other priorities for the ministry

this year include expanding market access for foreign capital.

Such work includes shortening the so-called negative list nationwide, including for free-trade pilot zones, and provides for allowing foreign investors to set up 100 per cent-owned companies in more industries.

It also entails efforts to open up service sectors more, he said.

The ministry will also focus on hosting the second international import expo and promote the construction of more free-trade pilot zones as well as experimenting with free-trade ports, Mr Zhong said. BLOOMBERG

INPUT ISSUE

We are aware of the error on some fares from Europe on our website because of an input issue.

“

SPOKESMAN FOR CATHAY PACIFIC AIRWAYS, in a statement yesterday, adding that the sale of such fares was stopped immediately and being probed.



A road bridge in Palu, Sulawesi, Indonesia, is shown in ruins after being hit by an earthquake and tsunami. At least 37,000 schools nationwide are located in disaster-vulnerable regions and the Indonesian authorities want to better prepare schoolchildren for disasters by making disaster training part of the education system. PHOTO: REUTERS

STARTING FROM SCHOOLS

As a disaster-prone country located in the Ring of Fire, we must be ready to respond to and accept the responsibility for any disaster. I've requested disaster education to be conducted better, consistently and early, integrated in our education system.

“

PRESIDENT JOKO WIDODO, in a Cabinet meeting last Monday, on integrating disaster training with the education system.

KNOW THE RISKS

The prerequisite is to know risks in surrounding environment and to pick places of evacuation or assembly points that are safer than houses, schools or offices. It is also necessary to hold drills routinely for all age groups. Based on Japan's experience, it's sufficient to have them only once or twice a year as long as they are carried out consistently.

“

DR MIZAN BISRI, a researcher on the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science-United Nations University programme, on the necessity of holding drills routinely and consistently.

Indonesia to teach kids disaster-readiness

Linda Yulisman
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

Indonesia is ramping up efforts to better prepare for natural disasters, starting with schoolchildren.

Last year was the country's deadliest year in more than a decade. Calamities like tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions claimed more than 4,500 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

"Given the potential for disasters in the country, it's time to have disaster education as part of the national curriculum," said President Joko Widodo late last month following the tsunami triggered by the sudden eruption of the Anak Krakatau volcano. The killer wave claimed more than 400 lives. Mr Joko's administration believes

that training children in disaster preparedness in schools will raise their awareness and equip them with the skills to survive disasters.

At least 37,000 schools nationwide are located in disaster-vulnerable regions, according to figures from the National Disaster Management Agency and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Meanwhile nearly half a million children were affected last year after more than 24,000 schools were destroyed by earthquakes that shook Lombok and Central Sulawesi, according to the National Secretariat of the Disaster Resilience Education Unit.

"As a disaster-prone country located in the Ring of Fire, we must be ready to respond to and accept the responsibility for any disaster.

I've requested disaster education to be conducted better, consistently and early, integrated in our education system," Mr Joko reiterated in a Cabinet meeting last Monday.

The government has said it will double its disaster mitigation budget to 15 trillion rupiah (\$51.4 billion) this year and also revive the defunct countrywide early tsunami warning system. Part of these funds will be used for disaster education in schools.

Dr Eko Yulianto, head of the Geotechnology Research Centre at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, said disaster education must focus on forming attitudes derived from direct experience through drills and practices rather than on learning from textbooks. "By experience, students will nurture consciousness that they have a responsibility to protect and save themselves," he said.

He said this can be imparted during geography or sports lessons or through extracurricular activities. Also useful are simple activities

>4,500

Number of lives lost last year, the country's deadliest year in more than a decade, after calamities like tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions struck.

such as teaching children how to strengthen class tables with tools or getting them to practise hiding under them during earthquake simulations. These lessons will have a lasting effect on children, he added, stressing the need for continuity and consistency in doing the drills.

Dr Mizan Bisri, a researcher on the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science-United Nations University programme, believes the introduction of disaster education will have a big impact if it is extended to all schools.

However, Dr Mizan noted budget constraints mean that many schools are left out. Still, he believes that routine drills and evacuation practices in schools will contribute to increased disaster preparedness.

He said to cope with disasters, Indonesia needs to adopt Japan's tsunami *tendenko* practice – which says that the individual should not stay and help others but run and preserve his or her life instead.

The schools can start with disaster drills and evacuation exercises but these should be designed for the natural disaster risks of the specific areas, he added.

Since the Dec 26, 2004, tsunami disaster that devastated Aceh province, Indonesia has made efforts to integrate disaster education in the school curriculum.

With the help of non-governmental organisations, the country has set up 25,000 disaster-safe schools.

"We need to find what kind and format of drills are feasible," said Dr Mizan, who researches humanitarian studies and disaster governance education. He noted that such a programme must be affordable and teach basic skills like being alert to disaster risks and evacuation to a safer place when disaster strikes.

"The prerequisite is to know risks in surrounding environment and to pick places of evacuation or assembly points that are safer than houses, schools or offices," he said.

He added: "It is also necessary to hold drills routinely for all age groups. Based on Japan's experience, it is sufficient to have them only once or twice a year, as long as they are carried out consistently."

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Indonesian woman who recorded boss' lewd call jailed

LABUAPI, Indonesia • Ms Nuril Maknun, a bookkeeper at a high school in Indonesia, faced constant harassment from her boss, the principal.

At school, he often described his sex life and pressured her to have an affair. After work, he would call her and continue his obscene monologues.

"That kind of conversation happened so often I couldn't even count," Ms Nuril said in a recent interview.

After months of harassment, she recorded one of the calls. The result: She lost her job and went to jail. Meanwhile, his career has flourished.

Ms Nuril's case, which is now before Indonesia's Supreme Court, has become a public example of the country's failure to protect women from sexual harassment, as well as the notoriously capricious nature of its judicial system.

Advocates for women say that unwanted sexual advances and obscene remarks are depressingly common in Indonesian workplaces, and that women have little recourse when subjected to them.

Ms Nuril, a 40-year-old mother of three, grew up on Lombok, an island east of Bali. In 2010, she got a temporary job helping with accounting at Senior High School Seven Mataram in Lombok's provincial capital.

She says her troubles began in 2013 with the arrival of a new principal, Muslim, who goes by one name as many Indonesians do.

In April of that year, according to Ms Nuril, Mr Muslim began talking to her frequently in lewd terms, both in person and on the phone.



Ms Nuril Maknun's boss accused her of criminal defamation when he learnt of the recording. She was charged with distributing obscene material. The trial court cleared her but the Supreme Court overturned the verdict. PHOTO: NYTIMES

She recorded one of his phone calls in August 2013.

She played the recording for her husband and a colleague.

Months later, a teacher who had learnt of the recording copied it from Ms Nuril's phone while the latter was in another room.

Ms Nuril said that fewer than a dozen people initially heard the recording, and that it was more than a year before Mr Muslim learnt of its existence. She said he offered to extend her contract if she deleted the recording. When she refused, she said, he fired her.

Three months after firing Ms Nuril, the principal went to the police and accused her of criminal defamation. The police interrogated Ms Nuril half a dozen times before arresting her in March 2017.

SELF PROTECTION

She recorded it for her own protection. She kept it for so long. Even when it spread, it was not she who distributed it.

“

MS NURIL'S LAWYER JOKO JUMADI, on why she made the recording and that she played no role in spreading it.

Eventually, prosecutors charged her with distributing obscene material, not defamation.

Ms Nuril spent two months in a Lombok jail. At her trial, teachers from the school testified that they,

not Ms Nuril, were the ones who had taken the recording from her phone and distributed it.

"She recorded it for her own protection," said her lawyer, Mr Joko Jumadi. "She kept it for so long. Even when it spread, it was not she who distributed it."

The trial court found Ms Nuril not guilty. But that was not the end.

In Indonesia, prosecutors can appeal an acquittal. They took her case to the Supreme Court, where the justices reversed the verdict in November. The three-judge panel sentenced her to six months in jail.

There was public outrage in response to the ruling. The office of the attorney-general said any punishment would be delayed until Ms Nuril's appeal, which her lawyer filed last week, was resolved. NYTIMES

Indonesia has enough HIV drug supplies, patients told

JAKARTA • Indonesia's health ministry has sought to reassure HIV patients that sufficient anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs will be available for their treatment after some hospitals ran out of supplies.

At least 29 hospitals and health centres in Indonesia had exhausted their stocks of a particular type of ARV, known as a fixed-dose combination of Tenofovir, Lamivudine and Efavirenz (TLE), Mr Aditya Wardhana of the Indonesia Aids Coalition, a non-governmental organisation, told a news conference.

The health ministry confirmed that a tender to procure some ARV drugs last year had failed, but said it had imported some of the TLE through The Global Fund, an international financing organisation to fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Still, the Indonesia Aids Coalition called for more emergency purchases via the fund, and urged President Joko Widodo to intervene.

More than 300,000 patients in Indonesia relied on ARV doses last year, according to health ministry data.

Dr Engko Sosialine Magdalene, director-general of pharmaceutical and medical devices at the ministry, said the country has enough fixed-dose ARV to last until May.

"A tender will start next month, so it will not impact our stocks," Dr Engko said last Saturday. She said in the meantime, patients unable to obtain the drug could use pills containing similar ingredients and there was sufficient stock until December.

Should the upcoming tender fail to be met by April, the health ministry had secured an additional 560,000 bottles of the separate TLE pills from the fund, Dr Engko said. NYTIMES

>300,000

Number of patients in Indonesia who relied on ARV doses last year, according to health ministry data.



Workers taking part in a demonstration against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government as part of a nationwide general strike in New Delhi last week. India intends to reserve 10 per cent of government jobs for poorer members of the upper caste, causing resentment in other communities, who say it is unfair and freezes them out. PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

News analysis

Govt job quota for higher castes seen as political ploy by BJP



Nirmala Ganapathy

India Bureau Chief
In New Delhi

Ruling party says it will address inequality, but critics say beneficiaries are key voters

The introduction of affirmative action in government jobs for the upper caste in India is a political coup by Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the opposition, said analysts.

They added that the move would help consolidate the upper caste vote in the general election later this year, even though it would likely have limited impact in uplifting poorer sections among them.

Both Houses of Parliament last week approved the Bill amending the Constitution to reserve 10 per cent of government jobs and seats in government education institutes for those in the upper castes who earn less than 800,000 rupees (\$815,294) annually and own less than 2 hectares of land.

It was an unprecedented move in a country where affirmative action has been limited to those in the lower castes.

Debate continues to rage on different aspects of the new legislation, including over the high cut-off figure in a country where the average annual income is around 137,000 rupees.

"First of all, reservation was

introduced in order to address social inequality. It is specific to the Indian context because we have had social discrimination based on the caste system and social inequality for centuries. The history of poverty can't be addressed through reservation, which was introduced for social inequality," said Dr Kiran Desai from the Centre for Social Studies, an autonomous social science research institute in Gujarat.

"The real issue is unemployment. Government jobs are shrinking.

Even with reservation, all the eligible people will not get employment. So they have to address unemployment through economic policy, which is a structural problem."

In India, quotas or reservation for the lower castes are present in the bureaucracy, Parliament and state assemblies, among others.

Many belonging to the lower castes, who face social stigma, have risen in various fields through affirmative action programmes in higher education and government jobs. As much as 50 per cent of jobs in the government and education institutes are reserved.

This bred resentment among upper castes, including among traditional agricultural communities like the Jats and Patidars or Rajputs. Over the past few years, these groups have launched protests, some of them violent, to demand quotas as jobs dried up for their youth. There is also a perception, particularly in the rural and semi-rural parts of the country, that government jobs conferred social status.

The jobs quota, however, comes against the backdrop of a shrinking number of government jobs. In 2016, the government admitted in the Upper House that the number of such jobs had gone

Despite the BJP's protestations, however, the latest legislation is expected to bring political dividends for the party which was jolted recently by election losses in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, three states regarded as its strongholds.

down even as job numbers went up in the private sector.

Many of those who have studied the affirmative action policy believe it actually has had limited success in poverty alleviation.

"It is precisely because the beneficiary groups are electorally powerful that they receive reservation benefits. This might, in many cases, also benefit disadvantaged individuals or groups. But that is a side effect of reservation policy in India rather than its main aim. The main aim is to win votes," said Ashoka University assistant professor of political science and legal studies Vinay Sipatpati.

Still the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has denied any political motive to its latest move and has criticised those, including the opposition, who have suggested this.

Despite the BJP's protestations, however, the latest legislation is expected to bring political dividends for the party, which was jolted recently by election losses in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, three states regarded as its strongholds.

The law now requires the President's assent to be implemented.

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Congress vows to simplify GST as poll nears

NEW DELHI • India's main opposition Congress party will simplify the goods and services tax (GST) and take "rational economic decisions" to attract foreign investment if voted back to power in a general election due by May, its leader, Mr Rahul Gandhi, said last Saturday.

Launched in 2017, the GST was initially hailed as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's biggest economic reform as it replaced more than a dozen federal and state levies and unified the economy.

But its chaotic implementation and complexities, months after a shock ban by Mr Modi on high-value bank currency aimed at unearthing untaxed wealth, badly hurt small businesses and led to millions of job losses in the cash-driven economy, presenting the biggest challenge to Mr Modi's re-election chances.

Mr Gandhi, scion of India's Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, said during a visit to Dubai that foreign investment was at a multi-year low in India due to the "ill-advised and badly thought out economic moves", such as the currency ban and a "poorly designed GST".

"We will take some rational economic decisions," he told a press conference, which was broadcast live on Twitter.

"We will restructure the GST and embrace investments from the Middle East and other parts of the world. We are the party of (India's) economic liberalisation, the party that gave the fastest economic growth in the first decade of the century and we will do that again."

He said his main priorities would be to create jobs, simplify the GST and rebuild confidence in institutions such as the Reserve Bank of India.

The Congress press conference was organised by the Indian Overseas Congress, which is present in about 35 countries, as Mr Gandhi tries to reach out to rich Indians living abroad for funds and social media support for the party that has dominated the country's politics for decades, before being nearly decimated in the last general election in 2014.

But back home, Mr Gandhi received a jolt when Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP) announced an election tie-up without Congress in Uttar Pradesh state, which sends the highest number of lawmakers to the lower house of Parliament.

"The BSP and SP have made a political decision," he said. "It's on us on how to strengthen the Congress party in Uttar Pradesh and we will fight with our full capacity. Whether we do or their alliance does, the BJP is not winning there."

Mr Modi said at the Delhi convention that the opposition was working on a "desperate alliance", while the BJP would give a "strong government".

The Hindu nationalist BJP lost power in three key states recently, forcing the government to announce a flurry of measures to woo small businesses and the less well-off since then. REUTERS

21 killed in China coal mine accident

BEIJING • The death toll in a coal mine roof collapse in northern China has risen to 21 after rescuers found two more miners dead yesterday, state media reported.

A total of 87 people were working underground in the Shaanxi province mine at the time of the accident on Saturday afternoon, according to official news agency Xinhua, citing local authorities.

Rescuers had been searching for two remaining trapped miners but found them dead yesterday morning, Xinhua reported. Another 66 miners were safely evacuated from the mine.

The cause of the accident at the site, run by privately owned Baiji Mining, is still under investigation.

Private coal mines in China typically take fewer safety precautions than larger state-owned mines.

Information about the accident cannot be disclosed, said a driver at



Rescuers at the coal mine owned by Baiji Mining in Shaanxi, China, yesterday. A total of 87 people were working underground when the roof of the mine collapsed on Saturday and 66 were safely evacuated. Rescuers found two remaining miners dead yesterday, bringing the death toll to 21. PHOTO: XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

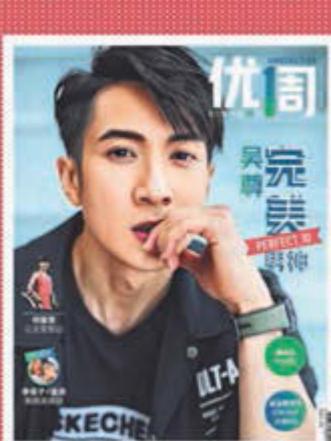
the company who answered Baiji's registered phone number. The mine is a small-scale operation, he said, declining to give his name.

Deadly mining accidents are com-

mon in China, where the industry has a poor safety record despite efforts to improve coal production conditions and crack down on illegal mines.

In December last year, seven miners were killed and three others injured in an accident at a coal mine in south-west China.

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Israel admits air strike on Iran target in Syria

PM Netanyahu says it struck warehouses holding Iranian arms at Damascus airport

JERUSALEM • Israel acknowledged yesterday that it carried out a weekend air strike on what it called an Iranian arms cache in Syria, and that it also completed a hunt for cross-border tunnels dug by Teheran-allied Lebanese Hizbollah guerrillas.

Long wary of publicity around its operations against Iran-linked targets on its northern front, Israel has been lifting the veil in recent

days – a sign of confidence in a campaign waged amid occasional tension with Syria's big-power backer, Russia.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may also be playing up his security credentials as he seeks re-election on April 9.

"We have been taking action with impressive success to arrest Iran's military entrenchment in Syria," Mr Netanyahu told his Cabinet in



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cited an Israeli search-and-dismantle mission against suspected Hizbollah attack tunnels along the border with Lebanon that was launched last month and deemed completed yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

televised remarks, saying this entailed "hundreds" of attacks over the past several years of Syria's civil war, in which Iranian and Hizbollah forces have backed the Damascus government against rebels and Is-

lamist insurgents.

"In just the last 36 hours, the air force struck Iran's warehouses, containing Iranian arms, in Damascus international airport," he added, referring to last Friday

night's sortie that Syria said it had answered with anti-aircraft fire.

Syrian state media said at the time of the attack that the damage was limited to a hit on a warehouse at Damascus airport.

Mr Netanyahu also cited an Israeli search-and-dismantle mission against suspected Hizbollah attack tunnels along the border with Lebanon that was launched last month and deemed completed yesterday.

The Israeli military said a sixth tunnel was found last Saturday, 55m deep and reaching "a few tens of metres" into Israeli territory from 800m within Lebanon.

"According to our assessments, there are no longer any tunnels crossing into Israel," military spokesman Jonathan Conricus said. He added that Hizbollah retained underground facilities on the Lebanese side.

Hizbollah has not commented on the tunnels, although UN peacekeepers in Lebanon have confirmed the existence of several.

Hizbollah and Israel last fought a war in 2006. While they have at times traded blows within Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, the Israel-Lebanon border has mostly been quiet.

Citing intelligence assessments, Israel's outgoing armed forces chief, Lieutenant-General Gadi Eizenkot, told a local TV station last Saturday that the tunnels were prepared in secret, over a period of years.

He said this was part of a Hizbollah plan to send as many as 1,500 fighters to infiltrate Israeli border communities during any future war. REUTERS

Alleged torture of Saudi women activists being probed: Sources

NEW YORK • Saudi Arabia's public prosecutor is investigating allegations that several prominent women's rights activists have been tortured in jail, according to three people familiar with the matter.

The torture, including electric shocks and floggings, allegedly occurred last year at a secret detention facility in an unknown location, according to four people. The prosecutor's office entered the picture after the government's Human Rights Commission conducted its own investigation, first reported by

the Wall Street Journal.

Prosecutors visited the activists in prison to take their testimony about physical and verbal abuse, as well as sexual harassment they say they have endured since they were detained last May, people said.

The Saudi government's Centre for International Communication did not respond to a request for comment.

In November, the media ministry had called the allegations, reported at the time by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch,

"baseless" and "simply wrong".

While Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is opening Saudi Arabia to foreign investment and has loosened social restrictions to grant women more rights, he has also cracked down on dissent, imprisoning dozens of critics across the political spectrum.

The campaign turned deadly in October with the murder of government critic Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Mr Khashoggi's killing created an international uproar,

though the government has vehemently denied that the Prince played a role.

The feminist activists, including Loujain al-Hathloul, Aziza al-Yousef and Eman al-Nafjan, had fought for years for Saudi women's rights, including the right to drive. They were arrested in May, along with several male supporters shortly before the government lifted its longstanding ban on women driving.

The authorities accused them of collaborating with unspecified foreign entities hostile to the kingdom

and local newspapers called them traitors.

In an opinion piece in The New York Times yesterday, Ms Alia al-Hathloul confirmed that a prosecutor had visited her sister in jail to take testimony.

Loujain al-Hathloul had told her parents "she had been held in solitary confinement, beaten, waterboarded, given electric shocks, sexually harassed and threatened with rape and murder", her sister wrote.

In an interview with Bloomberg in October, Prince Mohammed said

the Saudi authorities had videos and recordings that showed that the activists were working with foreign intelligence agencies and "being paid money to leak". He invited reporters to visit the prosecutor's office to review the evidence against them but the authorities have not granted multiple requests for access.

Last month, one of the male detainees – an 80-year-old lawyer who had once represented Hathloul – was freed, giving hope to some Saudi activists that the government could release others. BLOOMBERG



Officers from the Fisheries and Oceans department try to capture and relocate a stranded seal, found near residences, to open water. PHOTO: REUTERS

Ice cuts off dozens of seals' access to sea in Canadian town

LONDON, ONTARIO • The intruders arrived during the night with the wind and high tide. By the morning of Jan 3, it seemed like the little Canadian town had been overrun.

Seals, dozens of them. Seals on the beach, on the streets and driveways, in the parks and backyards.

More than a week later, they are still there in Roddickton-Bide Arm, a remote little town on the island of Newfoundland, Mayor Sheila Fitzgerald said last Friday.

And it has become clear that the animals, hungry and distressed, are stranded, unable to find their way back to sea.

Harp seals spend winters in the waters off Newfoundland and it is common for them to go ashore at times, and to swim into bays like the long, narrow inlet that borders Roddickton-Bide Arm, said Mr Garry Stenson, head of the marine mammal section at Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

"If the ice freezes up behind them, they have a harder time getting access to water," he told Canadian broadcaster CBC. "It's almost

like they get going in a direction and just keep going, hoping they're going to eventually find water."

The seals in Roddickton-Bide Arm, each one about 1.5m long and weighing about 136kg, crowded around the town's two brooks that do not freeze over in the winter. They then spread out, rolling around in the deep snow and barking like dogs.

Residents began to worry that the seals were there to stay through the winter – or might starve.

Ms Fitzgerald said: "They look so cute, but they're still wild animals."

She said the town hall was getting calls from people who had seen pictures and videos of the seals online, asking why residents did not help or feed the seals.

But in Canada, it is illegal to disturb marine mammals – not to mention potentially dangerous ones – including touching, feeding and even getting near them.

The mayor said there are at least 40 seals in and around Roddickton-Bide Arm, possibly many more.

Officials from the Department of



A stranded seal crawls on the snow on a road in Roddickton-Bide Arm, a remote town on the island of Newfoundland, in Canada. Dozens of them, hungry and distressed, are unable to find their way back to the sea. PHOTO: REUTERS

Fisheries and Oceans are in the town to assess the number of animals and find ways to help them get back to sea.

The situation is less than ideal for the residents as well as the animals.

The seals' silver-grey fur helps them blend in with the colour of icy roads that are dusted with sand in winter. People try to avoid the

seals, but two of them have died after being run over by vehicles.

Wildlife experts have warned that, like dogs, the seals can get aggressive when scared – and bite.

Millions of harp seals live in and around the far north Atlantic and Arctic. They are known for their pups, whose white coats help them

blend in with snow and ice.

Ordinarily, the people of Roddickton-Bide Arm have no problem with the creatures, but now, they are ready to get back to their traditional wildlife boast, that the town is the "Moose Capital of the World".

"We're ready for them to move on," Ms Fitzgerald said. "Right now, the whole of the talk is about seals."

NYTIMES

WorldBriefs

Philippine passport data allegedly stolen

MANILA • The Philippine privacy watchdog will investigate allegations by Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin that a disgruntled contractor made off with personal passport data and other documents held by the department.

The National Privacy Commission will look into "the Department of Foreign Affairs assertion that a private contractor has caused the non-availability of Filipino passport data and other documents entrusted to it for processing", it said in a statement last Saturday. BLOOMBERG

Bangladesh workers clash with police

DHAKA • Thousands of Bangladeshi garment workers churning out clothes for top global brands walked off the job yesterday and clashed with police as protests over low wages entered a second week. Police said water cannon and tear gas were fired to disperse striking factory workers in Savar, a garment hub outside the capital Dhaka. AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

Tear gas fired at Sudan protesters

KHARTOUM • Sudanese police fired tear gas yesterday at crowds of anti-government protesters in Khartoum and the western war-torn region of Darfur after organisers called for nationwide rallies against President Omar al-Bashir.

Unrest erupted last month after a government decision to triple the price of bread. The authorities say the protests have left 24 people dead, while Human Rights Watch put the toll at 40. AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

Protesters outside of the White House during the partial government shutdown last Saturday. According to a poll, more Americans, by a wide margin, blame Mr Trump and Republicans in Congress than congressional Democrats for the record-breaking government shutdown. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG



Trump denies hiding details of Putin talks

WASHINGTON • US President Donald Trump has rejected a Washington Post report that he has refused to share details of his conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin with top US government officials.

Mr Trump, in a telephone interview late last Saturday with Fox News, dismissed as "ridiculous" the Post story that alleged he went to great lengths to hide the content of his talks with Mr Putin, even confiscating the notes of his interpreter and ordering that person to not discuss what was said.

Mr Trump said he had "great conversation" with Mr Putin in Helsinki in July last year. When asked why not release details of the nearly two-hour conversation, Mr Trump said: "I would, I don't care."

"I mean, I had a conversation like every president does... We were talking about Israel and securing Israel and lots of other things... I'm not keeping anything under wraps, I couldn't care less."

According to the Post, there is no detailed record of Mr Trump's personal talks with Mr Putin at five locations over the past two years.

Mr Trump also told Fox, when asked about Mr Putin, that "no collusion" has been found between his 2016 campaign and Russia.

Mr Trump also took aim at an earlier story in The New York Times stating that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) launched a previously undisclosed investigation to determine whether he posed a national security threat at the same time that it opened a criminal probe into possible obstruction of justice.

The FBI investigation was later folded into the broader probe by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election and possible collaboration by the Trump campaign.

Fox asked if he had ever worked for Russia. "I think it's the most insulting thing I've ever been asked," Mr Trump said, without directly answering the question.

He then slammed the Times story as "the most insulting article ever written and if you read the article, you'd see that they found absolutely nothing".

No evidence has publicly emerged that Mr Trump was secretly in contact with or took direction from Russian officials, the Times said. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

No emergency declaration to end shutdown: Trump

US leader says he wants to give Democrats more time, chance to 'act responsibly'

WASHINGTON • United States President Donald Trump said he was holding off on declaring a state of emergency to end the partial US government shutdown that dragged into a 23rd day yesterday, as he insisted on US\$5.7 billion (\$S7.7 billion) to build a Mexico border wall that congressional Democrats oppose.

Asked by Fox News why he did not immediately declare a national emergency to secure the funds without congressional approval, Mr Trump said he wanted to give opposition Democratic lawmakers more time to strike a deal.

"I want to give them the chance to see if they can act responsibly," he told Fox in an interview late

last Saturday.

The US government shutdown became the longest on record at midnight last Friday, when it overtook a 21-day stretch in 1995-1996 under then President Bill Clinton.

Mr Trump fired off a series of tweets last Saturday in an effort to defend his stance and goad Democrats to return to Washington and end what he called "the massive humanitarian crisis at our Southern Border".

"Democrats could solve the shutdown in 15 minutes!" he said in one tweet, adding in another: "We will be out for a long time unless the Democrats come back from their vacations' and get back to work. I am

in the White House ready to sign!"

The impasse has paralysed Washington, its impact felt increasingly around the country, with the President refusing to sign off on budgets for swathes of government departments unrelated to the dispute.

As a result, about 800,000 federal employees, including FBI agents and air-traffic controllers, received no pay cheques last Friday.

At least one major airport has had to temporarily shutter a concourse because of staffing issues related to the shutdown.

Others are opening food pantries to support the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employees working without pay.

Miami International Airport closed one of its concourses for half the day last Saturday. Airport officials said they plan to do the same yesterday and today out of

concerns that they would not have enough employees to operate all the security checkpoints.

Airport spokesman Greg Chin said the decision to close some parts was a "precautionary measure to optimise staffing" during peak times, when large numbers of cruise-line passengers leave the city.

According to TSA statistics, airports across the country are also facing staffing shortages.

After several news outlets published stories featuring long lines at airport security, the Department of Homeland Security pushed back, calling the reporting "fake news".

Officials say there have been no major delays and no impact on national security.

Opponents say a unilateral presidential move like declaring emergency would be constitutional overreach and set a dangerous prece-

dent in similar controversies.

Mr Trump pushed back last Saturday on a media report that his White House was "chaotic" with no plan or strategy to end the shutdown.

To understand the plan, "you would have to understand the fact that I won the election and I promised... a wall at the Southern Border. Elections have consequences", he tweeted.

According to a Washington Post-ABC News poll, more Americans, by a wide margin, blame Mr Trump and Republicans in Congress than congressional Democrats for the now record-breaking government shutdown. Most also reject the President's assertion that there is an illegal-immigration crisis on the southern border.

Support for building a wall on the border, which is the principal sticking point in the stalemate between the President and Democrats, has increased over the past year. Today, 42 per cent say they support a wall, up from 34 per cent in January last year. A slight majority of Americans, 54 per cent, oppose the idea, down from 63 per cent a year ago.

The poll was conducted from last Tuesday to Friday among a random national sample of 788 Americans.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE,
WASHINGTON POST

SEE OPINION A16

Democrat rising star hopes to be US' first Hispanic president

SAN ANTONIO • Mr Julian Castro, the telegenic former mayor of San Antonio, Texas, and Obama-era Cabinet member, launched his bid to become the nation's first Hispanic president last Saturday, emphasising a message of hope and diversity at a time when Americans are locked in angry debate over immigration and border security.

"I am a candidate for the president of the United States," Mr Castro, 44,

told a crowd in San Antonio's historic Guadalupe Plaza, during a speech that frequently invoked the immigrant heritage that brought his family to the US from Mexico.

Often called a rising star in the Democratic Party, Mr Castro, who was Mr Barack Obama's housing secretary, and the youngest member of that Cabinet, is expected to be part of a diverse field of candidates eager to challenge President Donald Trump.

At a time when the federal government has been partly shut down over Mr Trump's demand for funds to build a wall on the Mexican border, Mr Castro sounded a contrasting message.

He said San Antonio, a city that is nearly two-thirds Hispanic, "represents America's future: diverse, fast-growing, optimistic".

"Yes, we must have border security, but there is a smart and hu-

mane way to do it. And there is no way in hell that caging children is keeping us safe," he said.

"We say no to building a wall and say yes to building community," he added, to roars from the crowd.

Mr Castro's twin brother, Joaquin, who introduced him last Saturday, is a congressman.

The two rode to the event together on the same bus line that once took them to public school.

Mr Castro is the third candidate with a Latino background to seek the presidency in recent years, after two Republicans, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas and Mr Marco Rubio of Florida, unsuccessfully faced Mr Trump in that party's 2016 primary campaign. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Mr Julian Castro, often called a rising star in the Democratic Party, is the third candidate with a Latino background to seek the presidency in recent years. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

OPINION

THE STRAITS TIMES

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The Straits Times says

Peace of mind in insurance has a price

The recent report that a patient could claim only \$4.50 for a medical bill of \$4,477 from MediShield Life (MSL) has put the national health insurance plan's coverage in the spotlight. The patient's total bill for a procedure at the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) was over \$12,000, but came down to \$4,477 after government subsidies. This amount exceeded the MSL limit for the procedure, and a claim of only \$4.50 was permitted in the end. Two questions arise: Are MSL claim limits too low even for treatment at subsidised, government-run facilities? Or were charges at the SNEC simply out of whack? The SNEC has said it will review its charges. And in a sign that under-coverage is not confined to a few isolated pa-

tients, the Ministry of Health revealed that eight in 10 subsidised bills were within the MediShield Life claim limits, and nine in 10 were within \$230 of the claim limits. For some context: When MediShield Life was launched in 2015, one in 10 subsidised bills exceeded MSL claim limits, but it is now two in 10. In other words, claims exceeding coverage limits have doubled in three years.

Just as MSL has claim limits to cap the insurance system's exposure to big bills, it may be time to cap the amount that patients must pay, health commentators here have suggested. One argued that limiting Singaporeans' exposure to big medical bills that may financially ruin them and their family is necessary for genuine peace of mind.

That call resonated with many on social media – not surprisingly, since peace of mind is desired by all. But it comes at a price. Every treatment has to be paid for by somebody. Singapore has a mixed financing model based on government subsidies, self-funded Medisave, risk-pooled MediShield Life with deductibles and co-payment, employer-supported healthcare for some workers, and Medifund for the indigent.

Any part of the system that reduces the burden on one party – such as on individuals – needs to be picked up elsewhere. In medical insurance, someone somewhere picks up the tab. In Canada and Australia, where medical care is "free" for patients because the state funds it, taxes are high.

So in Singapore, those who want MSL to have higher payouts, and cover not just 90 per cent of claims but 99.9 per cent, logically must also support higher premiums. Yet premiums must remain affordable for all.

How can a balance be struck in a way that gives genuine peace of mind to all? As a government-administered but patient-funded health insurance plan, MSL requires buy-in and trust from patients. The latest figures on MSL came only after a series of Straits Times reports on the issue. The authorities must do better in releasing information on MSL in a timely manner. That way, when premiums must go up, Singaporeans would be better placed to know why.

Global Affairs

Lessons from French 'yellow vest' protests

Populist backlash threatens to grow stronger as voters tire of yet more promises of dialogue to heal social divide



Jonathan Eyal

Global Affairs Correspondent

PARIS • France is embarking tomorrow on a unique experiment: nothing less than a "grand national debate" about the country's future.

This isn't one of those consultations governments worldwide launch periodically in an effort to portray themselves as "listening to voters"; if the French authorities are to be believed, their aim is to unleash a truly gigantic national dialogue, attracting the active engagement of millions of citizens, with the aim of deciding France's fundamental institutions for generations to come.

"It's a great opportunity and everyone must take it... I want a real debate," said President Emmanuel Macron, who has promised to release today an open letter to the French people outlining what he intends to do in this "vital" moment.

It is easy to understand why President Macron – not otherwise famous for listening to others – has suddenly developed a passion for national debates; he is hoping to silence a wave of violent protests from tens of thousands of *gilets jaunes* – or "yellow vests" as they came to be known after the high-visibility motorists' vests they wear – who have sowed destruction on the streets of the French capital and of many other cities every single Saturday for the past nine weeks.

But it is highly unlikely that Mr Macron's gesture will produce

the expected results. For France is undergoing a much deeper crisis of its political system. And what is happening in France has darker implications for the future of Europe.

REBELLION AGAINST THE POLITICAL CLASS

In essence, the "yellow vests" are a reminder that the spectre of populism, of a rebellion by voters against an entire political class, is not only undefeated, but may actually be poised to acquire a new momentum.

France is famous for protest movements that start spontaneously over supposedly trifling complaints, only to morph into gigantic political storms that overthrow governments.

Over the past two centuries, France was an empire twice, a monarchy three times and a republic no less than five times.

A cartoon from the British media of the 19th century amusingly – if cruelly – summed up France's stormy existence by depicting a woman who walks into a bookshop, asking to buy a copy of the French Constitution. "Sorry Madam," came the shopkeeper's reply, "we sell books, not periodicals."

The situation in France today is nowhere near a revolution, however much the "yellow vest" demonstrators would like it to be.

True, the number of protesters actually increased recently; this past weekend, 32,000 demonstrators took to the streets, more than over the past few weeks, but a paltry figure compared with the hundreds of thousands when the protests began last November. And about 80,000 policemen were deployed nationwide in France to confront them; the powers of the French state remain overwhelming.

Nevertheless, the movement that began as a protest against a fuel tax,



and which quickly scored a victory when it saw the tax withdrawn, has succeeded in shaking to the core the current political landscape in France. And for a good reason, since the protesters are venting their frustration against their marginalisation by France's political elite.

Never in modern times have the French expressed such distrust in the actors of their political life. And the President of the Republic – both his function and his person – is the epicentre of this political earthquake.

To a certain extent, Mr Macron is merely at the receiving end of old problems. These include a resentment against the forces of globalisation that have flooded France with cheaper and more plentiful consumer goods but also resulted in higher unemployment rates and stagnating wages, high levels of immigration and a sense of powerlessness, a feeling that however people vote and whatever leaders they elect, nothing ever changes.

The divide is between a France of globalised metropolises – of the swish Parisian restaurants where cosmopolitan elites debate the merits of various Michelin stars – and that of the banal, bleak reality of suburbs and rural areas where migrants lead segregated lives in decaying housing estates, and villagers are forgotten apart from one month in the year – usually August – when the sons or

daughters of the urban elites

decamp to the countryside to take pictures of the "natives".

SERIES OF BROKEN PROMISES

Generations of French politicians had pledged to remedy this profound divide, yet nothing was done. Back in the mid-1990s, Mr Jacques Chirac made the reduction of the "social fracture" – as he put it – the key theme of his presidential campaign. Once ensconced in the gilded office in the Elysee Palace, however, he did nothing.

The French electorate rebelled again in 2002, when far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen managed to get into the second round of the presidential election, an astonishing result and the first wake-up call about the populist menace in Europe. Mr Chirac won again, and assured the electorate that he understood their "call for politics to change", but changed nothing.

Nothing changed, either, in the aftermath of the 2005 referendum, when the French rejected the draft European constitutional treaty in a fit of frustration against their rulers; the EU charter was subsequently approved by Parliament.

Nor did things change when Mr Nicolas Sarkozy became president in 2007 on a platform promising radical economic reform that quickly petered out, or when Mr Francois Hollande was elected in 2012 on a policy to improve social welfare, only to do

exactly the opposite.

A decade after the outbreak of the global economic crisis in 2008, neither the right nor the left in France has been able to address the basic problems at the heart of the revolt of the "yellow vests": unemployment, social insecurity and exclusion.

Worldwide, Mr Macron was hailed as the man who would break this cycle. Not only was he himself anti-establishment – he was elected French President in 2017 as an outsider, a man who succeeded in outmanoeuvring the establishment – but he also defeated Ms Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Front and daughter of the same Jean-Marie who first came to prominence earlier this century. For a while, Mr Macron seemed to embody Europe's hope and promise to slay the populist monster.

So, what went wrong? Literally, everything. The very fact that he defied all expectations and rose to the top made Mr Macron tone deaf to any advice; he developed a particularly unique inability to talk to ordinary French voters. He promised to pursue a policy of neither left nor right, but ended up with pretty right-wing priorities, such as reducing taxes for the wealthy, in itself not necessarily a bad idea, yet political suicide in today's France.

MACRON'S BIGGEST MISTAKE

But his most egregious mistake was to destroy the entire French political system he inherited, without constructing anything new.

The traditional centre-left socialists and the centre-right Gaullists have both been reduced to irrelevance; France's Parliament is dominated by a concoction of celebrities and political dandies, glued together into an artificial party that Mr Macron created in a rush two years ago.

His party won power because of France's disgust with its previous political elite. But it did not take voters too long to work out that turfing out one lot of politicians only to end up with a new lot that also does nothing but repeat the old cliches is not a great choice either.

The moral of the French episode for the rest of Europe is that it's not enough to keep at bay the populist backlash in Europe by contributing to the destruction of the old political class, if the only outcome is its replacement by a new political class that is just as clueless. Rightly or wrongly, President Macron is blamed for everything because he tried to do everything.

"It is hard to recognise the country that has brought to power Emmanuel Macron and its promise of democratic revolution," says Dr Bruno Cautres, a political expert at Sciences Po, France's most prestigious social sciences institution.

And opinion polls just released in Paris indicate that the rot in France's political life goes much deeper. According to France's Centre for the Study of Political Life, which conducts an early survey of such topics, not only is trust in politicians down to single-digit figures, but trust in peaceful ways of change is also declining.

LOSS OF TRUST

Back in 2010, two-thirds of ordinary Frenchmen and women believed that elections were the way to influence or change decisions affecting their lives, but only half do so today. Instead, street protests are cited by 42 per cent of today's respondents as the best way of changing things. And a full 72 per cent want to be able to impose their views in referendums that they can call at will, the surest indication that they no longer trust their elected representatives or institutions.

The danger is that the revival of populism in France will embolden populists elsewhere in Europe. Italy's government – run by far-right politicians – has already expressed its support for the "yellow vests". And European parliamentary elections are looming this year. So, what happens in France, does not stay in France.

For Mr Macron, however, regaining the trust of his voters won't be easy. At least not until he and his associates recall one basic warning that Mr Pierre Mendes France, a brilliant politician of previous generations, once offered his successors.

"Democracy," he said, "does not consist of putting a ballot periodically in an urn, delegating the powers to one or more elected representatives and then losing interest and keeping silent for the subsequent five years."

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India is a land of cities, not villages

The difference matters for the lives of millions of its citizens

Reuben Abraham and Pritika Hingorani

It's an election year in India, with the world's largest polls expected in the spring.

The focus of politicians is, as usual, on farmers and rural areas and competitive pandering to both – hardly surprising in a country that considers itself a nation of villages.

However, this narrative has one major flaw. India is, in fact, more urban than politicians know or acknowledge. This seriously affects India's growth prospects, leading to inefficiencies and loss of productivity in both rural and urban areas.

What's worse, the resulting misallocation of resources is making India's blossoming urban areas well-nigh unliveable.

The problem – in India as elsewhere – is largely one of definition. What constitutes a city or urban area varies widely around the world.

Some nations employ simple population cut-offs: Mexico and Venezuela count any town with more than 2,500 residents as urban, while New Zealand's count is 1,000 people.

Since 2000, the US Census has focused instead on population density (above a minimum threshold of 2,500 residents).

China uses a density criterion of 1,500 people per sq km, but recently expanded the definition to include residents of villages that are directly connected to municipal infrastructure or that receive public services from urban municipalities.

In India, only "statutory towns" are considered urban and have a municipal administration – a definition that officially leaves the country 26 per cent urban.

State governments make the decision using widely differing criteria; demographic considerations are peripheral at times. The Census of India provides the only other official, and uniform, estimate. Its formula uses a mix of population, density and occupation criteria, and pegs India at 31 per cent urban. Such estimates can be misleadingly low.

For instance, Kerala is statutorily only 16 per cent urban. Yet the census sees the well-developed southern state as approximately 48 per cent urban. If we use a population cut-off of 5,000 residents, like Ghana and Lebanon, or even Mexico's threshold of 2,500



A roadside art fair in Bangalore. India is close to 50 per cent urban but considers itself a nation of villages, say the writers. They add that this seriously affects the country's growth prospects, leading to inefficiencies and loss of productivity in both rural and urban areas, and the resulting misallocation of resources. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

people, Kerala's urban share leaps to 99 per cent, which is more consistent with ground reality.

In effect, a state that's close to 100 per cent urban is being governed as if it is only 16 per cent urban. This pattern plays out across many large Indian states.

Using a reasonably conservative definition like Ghana, India is, in fact, close to 50 per cent urban, far removed from the dominant narrative that people in India live in the villages.

The consequences of underestimating the urban share of the population are dire. Resources are badly misallocated – by one estimate, over 80 per cent of federal government financing still goes to rural development.

This reduces incentives for politicians, especially rural ones, to change the status quo. Tens of millions of Indians who live in dense, urban-like settlements are governed by rural governments that lack the mandate and

money to deliver basic services.

In India, urban governments are constitutionally required to provide things such as fire departments, sewer lines, arterial roads and building codes. Local bodies in rural areas aren't.

Not acknowledging towns as urban also encourages haphazard and chaotic development.

Satellite data clearly shows that most cities extend well beyond their administrative limits and dense, linear settlements spread out of those cities along transit corridors.

This growth is unregulated and unplanned, marred by narrow roads, growing distance from major thoroughfares, limited open space and haphazardly divided plots.

As the map of growth in Kozhikode (formerly known as Calicut) between 1975 to 2014 shows, what appears to be a single economic unit is now governed by a multitude of rural and urban jurisdictions, with no mechanism

The consequences of underestimating the urban share of the population are dire. Resources are badly misallocated – by one estimate, over 80 per cent of federal government financing still goes to rural development. This reduces incentives for politicians, especially rural ones, to change the status quo. Tens of millions of Indians who live in dense, urban-like settlements are governed by rural governments that lack the mandate and money to deliver basic services.

to coordinate on mobility, public goods or municipal services. It's difficult and expensive to retrofit such cities with proper infrastructure and services. Road widths can range from an average of 10m pre-1990 to 4m in new growth areas.

India is not the only country to face these problems, even though its size and level of development make the challenge particularly acute. The planet is more than 50 per cent urban and continues to urbanise rapidly, almost entirely in the developing regions of Asia and Africa.

As long as there are no standard definitions, urban-rural classifications are likely to be political, path-dependent and arbitrary. This will deny many countries the vital scale and agglomeration economies provided by urban areas, a necessary condition for escaping poverty.

A universal definition would need to be flexible. Instead of

imposing a simple population cut-off, governments could track population densities and offer more urban services where they are highest.

Additionally, satellite data can be used to track the spread of development, so that city boundaries are expanded when necessary and where logical.

Any attempt to create a common and well-understood urban definition will be politically fraught and contested. But such an effort is critical.

Whether millions get to live in the equivalent of Melbourne, Tokyo or Stockholm, rather than Mumbai, Lagos or Kinshasa, crucially depends on these choices.

• Reuben Abraham is CEO and senior fellow at the Mumbai-based independent public policy think-tank, IDFC Institute, where Pritika Hingorani is director and research fellow.

US shutdown a reminder of good things govt does

Paul Waldman

Over half a century ago, researchers Lloyd Free and Hadley Cantril identified a paradox in American public opinion that largely holds true today.

Most Americans, they argued, were "ideologically conservative" but "operationally liberal" when it came to their beliefs about government.

People liked the idea of limited government in the abstract, believing they could and should be able to get along without government's help. But when you asked them about the specific things government does, it turned out that they liked just about all of them, and thought government should spend as much or more to keep performing those tasks.

This contradiction, and the persistence of that abstract belief in small government, is in large part what allows Republicans – whose positions on policy issues are mostly unpopular – to stay competitive and hold on to power.

But the partial shutdown of the federal government is giving all of us a vivid demonstration of what government actually does. By taking it away.

Let's look around at just some of

what's happening right now:

- The Food and Drug Administration has halted food safety inspections.
- Environmental Protection Agency inspectors are no longer monitoring compliance with environmental laws.
- Air traffic controllers, who make sure the 43,000 daily flights in the US don't slam into one another and send some of the 2.6 million passengers plunging to a fiery death, are working without pay.
- Aid programmes like food stamps and the Women, Infants, and Children programme, which provides formula, food and other kinds of assistance to poor mothers and their children, could soon run out of money and have to curtail benefits.
- Federal contractors are losing US\$200 million (S\$270 million) a day, according to Bloomberg.
- The backlog at immigration courts, which was already severe, is growing worse by the day as the processing of cases has shut down.
- The E-Verify system, which allows employers to verify that employees are legal to work in the United States, is no longer operating.
- Small business loans and government-backed mortgages

are on hold, leaving businesses stuck and home buyers in limbo.

- Farmers who rely on government loans and services have been particularly hard hit, leaving the survival of many family farms in jeopardy.
- The FBI Agents Association is warning that the shutdown "is threatening national security as thousands of federal law enforcement professionals, working without pay, grow anxious that personal financial hardships may jeopardise their security clearances and as furloughs of their support staff slow investigations".
- Preparations for the vital 2020 US Census have been impeded by the shutdown, and dozens of other surveys the bureau conducts have been stopped, leading to information gaps that could destabilise the US economy, economists say.
- Without park rangers to keep order, national parks have been overrun with trash, vandalism and misbehaviour by visitors; some people have even cut down trees in Joshua Tree National Park.

That's just a small selection of the effects the shutdown is having, which range from the inconvenient (museums being closed) to the life-threatening (no food inspections to make sure your kids don't get E. coli poisoning).

It's almost as if the US federal government, rather than just being an oppressive bunch of faceless bureaucrats taking your money and getting all up in your business, actually performs lots of important duties that allow a modern society to function!

And of course, as we've seen so often, President Donald Trump has a unique ability to take something that's bad and make it worse.

The administration is now considering declaring a state of emergency and taking money from "dozens of flood control projects in areas affected by recent natural disasters, including the Texas coastline inundated by Hurricane Harvey and parts of Puerto Rico battered by Hurricane Maria" in order to pay for Mr Trump's border wall. If you find that horrifying, that's the whole point.

One administration official told The New York Times that floating ideas like that one "was as much a political exercise intended to threaten projects Democrats valued as a pragmatic one".

The idea behind that is the same one that has driven Republican strategy in every shutdown they've created. It says that since Democrats care about government and Republicans don't, as the effects of the shutdown on the country get worse and worse, Democrats will inevitably cave to Republican demands.

The Democrats' concern for human suffering makes them weak, while Republicans can watch the chaos unfold and be assured that if anything, it will just convince voters that government doesn't work and therefore they should elect the party that holds government in nothing but contempt. The strategy is not completely crazy, but it does have one major flaw: Taking away government reminds people of what government does.

It puts the focus not on the

Taking away government reminds people of what government does. It puts the focus not on the ideological, abstract sense of government but on the operational, specific sense of government. It shows people all the things so many would prefer to ignore as they convince themselves that they are completely self-reliant. That's why it's usually Republicans who lose these conflicts.

ideological, abstract sense of government but on the operational, specific sense of government.

It shows people all the things so many would prefer to ignore as they convince themselves that they are completely self-reliant. That's why it's usually Republicans who lose these conflicts.

They may not care about what happens to Americans in a shutdown, but they do care about their own political fortunes.

As the public grows more and more dismayed over the situation, and properly affixes blame on the GOP, Republicans eventually decide that it needs to end.

The only question is how much damage will be done by the time we reach that point.

WASHINGTON POST

How American capitalism lost its way

David Brooks

Suddenly, economic populism is all the rage.

In a recent headline-making monologue on Fox News, conservative talk show host Tucker Carlson argued that American elites are using ruthless market forces to enrich themselves and immiserate everyone else.

"Anyone who thinks the health of a nation can be summed up in GDP is an idiot," he said in his attack on free-market capitalism. "Any economic system that weakens and destroys families is not worth having."

On the campaign trail, Mr Bernie Sanders and Ms Elizabeth Warren are telling left-wing versions of the same story.

In an era of tribal emotionalism, you are always going to be able to make a splash reducing a complex problem to a simple narrative that separates the world into the virtuous "us", and the evil "them" (the bankers).

But I'd tell a third story about America's current plight, which is neither economic populism nor free-market fundamentalism.

My story begins in the 1970s.

The economy was sick. Corporations were bloated. Unions got greedy. Tax rates were too high and regulations were too tight. We needed to restore economic dynamism.

So, in 1978, then President Jimmy Carter signed a tax Bill that reduced individual and corporate tax rates. Senator Ted Kennedy led the effort to deregulate the airline and trucking industries. And when he came into office, President Ronald Reagan took it up another notch.

It basically worked. The US has had four long economic booms since then. But there was an interesting cultural shift that happened along the way.

In a healthy society, people try to balance a whole bunch of different priorities – economic, social, moral, familial.

Somehow, over the past 40 years, economic priorities took the top spot and obliterated everything else. As a matter of policy, we privileged economics and then, eventually, no longer could even see that there could be other priorities.

For example, there's been a striking shift in how corporations see themselves. In normal times, corporations serve a lot of stakeholders – customers, employees, the towns in which they are located. But these days, corporations see themselves as serving one purpose and one stakeholder – maximising shareholder value.

Activist investors demand that every company ruthlessly cut the

Capitalism is a wonderful system. The populists are perpetually living in 2008, when the financial crisis vindicated all their prejudices. They've ignored everything since – the 19 million jobs that have been created, the way wages are now rising at 3.2 per cent. But capitalism needs to be embedded in moral norms and it needs to serve a larger social good. Remoralising and resocialising the market is the great project of the moment.

cost of its employees if it will raise the short-term stock price. We turned off the moral lens.

You probably know the example of the Israeli daycare centres. Parents kept showing up late to pick up their kids. To address the problem, the centres experimented with imposing a fine on the late parents. But the number of late pick-ups doubled.

Before that, going to pick up one's kid on time was a moral obligation – to be fair to workers at the daycare centre. After the fine was imposed, it was seen as an economic transaction. Parents were happy to pay to be late.

America more or less did this as an entire society – it switched to a purely economic lens.

A deadly combination of right-wing, free-market fundamentalism and left-wing, moral relativism led to a withering away of moral norms and shared codes of decent conduct. We ripped the market out of its moral and social context and let it operate purely by its own rules. We made the market its own priest and confessor.

Society came to be seen as an atomised collection of individual economic units pursuing self-interest. Selfishness was normalised.

As Mr Steven Pearlstein puts it in his outstanding book, *Can American Capitalism Survive?*: "Old-fashioned norms around loyalty, cooperation, honesty, equity, fairness and compassion no longer seem to apply in the economic sphere."

Anything you could legally do to make money was deemed okay. A billion-dollar salary for a hedge fund manager? Perfectly acceptable.

The Apple corporation exists because of American institutions. But, as Mr Pearlstein notes, Apple parked its intellectual property in an Irish subsidiary so it could avoid paying taxes in America and support those institutions. It saved US\$9 billion in 2012 alone.

This is clearly sleazy behaviour. Apple employees should be humiliated and ashamed. But today, the amorality of the trading floor governs corporate decision-making. Mr Pearlstein quotes corporate raider Carl Icahn: "I don't believe in the word 'fair'."

So Apple paid no reputational price when it stiffed its own country. Social trust arises from a covenant: I give to my company, my town and my government, and they give back to me. But that covenant was ripped. Now, the general perception is: When I give, they take.

As we disembedded individuals from traditional moral norms, we disembedded companies from social ones.

Human beings are moral animals, and suddenly, American moral animals found themselves in an amoral economic system, which felt increasingly alienating and gross.

We wound up with the secession of the successful and, in many parts of the country, we wound up decimating the social trust that is actually a prerequisite for economic prosperity.

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Remoralising and resocialising the market is the great project of the moment.

The crucial question is not, how can we have a good economy? It is – how can we have a good society? How can we have a society in which it's easier to be a good person?

NYTIMES



Demonstrators at a pro-Brexit rally in London last month. British Premier Theresa May is trying hard to make a chaotic no-deal Brexit seem as if it is an inescapable force of nature, says the writer. Yet it seems unlikely she would embrace the chaos when, with a stroke of her pen, she could call it all off, he adds. PHOTO: NYTIMES

Trump, Brexit and the art of political brinkmanship

Tim Harford

Brinkmanship is an old idea, but not such an old word. It was first used in 1956, after then US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles opined that "the ability to get to the verge without getting into the war is the necessary art... if you are scared to go to the brink, you are lost".

Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic presidential nominee, began to use the term "brinkmanship" in response. He did not intend it as a compliment.

Yet we find ourselves surrounded on all sides by leaders who think they have mastered this "necessary art". The stakes are blessedly lower, but still high enough to deserve examination.

In the United States, President Donald Trump has failed to deliver on his promise to get Mexico to pay for his border wall, and has partly shut down the federal government until Congress agrees that the US taxpayer will fund it instead.

Voters will reach their own conclusions as to who is to blame.

In Britain, Prime Minister Theresa May wants Parliament to vote for the unappetising Brexit deal she has negotiated with the European Union.

She offers two simultaneous and mutually exclusive threats, confronting hardliners with the prospect of no Brexit at all, while

warning the EU and British moderates that there will be a chaotic "no deal" outcome instead.

Whether we are talking about Brexit, a border wall, or the early stages of the Vietnam War, each situation is different. Yet it is worth pondering similarities in the structure of the problem.

These threats may seem empty.

Dulles did not want nuclear war. Mrs May does not want six-day-long traffic jams on the way into Dover. Nevertheless the threat may be made credible enough to achieve results. How?

DOOMSDAY MACHINE

One option is to use a doomsday machine, made famous by Stanley Kubrick's dark comedy *Dr Strangelove*. The doomsday machine is credible because it is automatic. It cannot be switched off, only obeyed. The risks are obvious; in the movie, the doomsday machine destroys civilisation.

Mrs May's doomsday machine was the Article 50 divorce process, which we were told could not be halted once begun. Without parliamentary approval of a deal, this legal doomsday machine would deliver a disruptive no-deal by default.

Triggering Article 50 weakened the British Prime Minister's negotiating hand with the EU but strengthened it when dealing with those Members of Parliament who seem open to reason.

Yet it now transpires that the machine has an off switch after all.

The British government can simply revoke its notification to leave. Mrs May therefore managed to hobble her bargaining position with the EU while leaving herself hostage to her own party.

'MADMAN' STRATEGY

The second tactic for gaining credibility is the "madman" strategy: If you are insane, or can fake insanity, then insane threats seem plausible.

The strategy was flawlessly executed by Sheriff Bart in the film *Blazing Saddles*, who managed to escape being lynched by racists by threatening to shoot himself.

That achievement is hard to replicate, though. As Bart tells himself: "You are so talented. And they are so dumb!"

Mr Trump is erratic enough to make the madman tactic seem plausible, although he has also frequently backed down.

Mrs May does a good line in stubbornness, and is trying hard to make a chaotic no-deal seem as if it is an inescapable force of nature, like an earthquake or a flood. Yet it seems unlikely she would embrace the chaos when, with a stroke of her pen, she could call it all off.

Some leading Brexiteers, however, have perfected the madman pose; they have convinced me that they simply do not care. Perhaps I have been fooled by a brilliant bluff. Perhaps.

There is a third way to make threats credible: Create the risk of an accident.

CLIFF-EDGE DARE

Professor Thomas Schelling, Cold War strategist and Nobel laureate economist, described handcuffing yourself to your opponent, then cowering on the edge of a cliff.

You're not suicidal, but you are willing to create the risk of an accident.

If your counterpart fears that risk more than you, you may extract concessions.

As Prof Schelling and his fellow strategists knew, in situations such as the Cuban missile crisis, there was always a risk that something would get out of hand, and all of us would slip off the cliff together. It was this that made world-ending threats plausible.

If you are finding all this disconcerting, you are not alone.

Somehow we have managed to produce a situation where democratically elected politicians are threatening substantial harm to their own countries as a bargaining tactic. The tactic is credible because accidents happen. At least we can comfort ourselves that long-range bombers are not involved.

How did we get here? Recall the final scene of *Dr Strangelove*.

With Armageddon inevitable, Dr Strangelove reassures the all-male leadership of the US that they could survive in underground cities. The survival of the human race would be ensured by a ratio of 10 "highly stimulating" women to each man. Everyone seems rather cheered by this thought.

Brinkmanship does not work if it does not create a risk of harm. Yet the people practising the strategy may not be the ones who will experience it. FINANCIAL TIMES

The dangers of calling out cyber attackers

Leonid Bershidsky

The US\$100 million (\$135 million) lawsuit that Mondelez, the maker of Oreo and Cadbury chocolate, has brought against Zurich Insurance Group shows that governments should be more careful about identifying the would-be culprits in putative cyberwars: Such claims can have unintended consequences and can sometimes harm businesses.

In June 2017, a malware program dubbed ExPetr or NotPetya wreaked havoc at Danish shipping giant Maersk, US pharmaceutical titan Merck and a number of other big corporations, including Mondelez. NotPetya used an exploit known as EternalBlue, created by the United States National Security Agency and leaked earlier in 2017.

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NYTIMES



Governments should be more careful about identifying the would-be culprits in cyberwars as such claims can have unintended consequences and can sometimes harm businesses, says the writer. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

fits the naming-and-shaming pattern established in recent years.

They don't feel compelled to provide any proof. That's unnecessary, if the idea is to tell Russia: "We know what you're doing." Russia invariably denies involvement, so the consequences are usually limited to a publicity blast. But not in this case: The Mondelez-Zurich dispute could set a nasty precedent, raising the question of whether the rules of business need to be changed to take into account the Brave New World of cyber attacks.

Mondelez claimed US\$100 million on its insurance policy because it believed the permanent damage to 1,700 of its servers and 24,000

laptops, inflicted by NotPetya, plus the theft of thousands of user credentials, unfulfilled customer orders and other losses fell under the provision of its insurance policy that covered "physical loss or damage to electronic data, programs or software" caused by "the malicious introduction of a machine code or instruction".

In June last year, Zurich countered that NotPetya fell under an exclusion in the policy covering "hostile or warlike action in time of peace or war", which meant the insurer didn't have to make good on the claim. Mondelez sued, asserting that Zurich's application of the exclusion to a cyber attack or, indeed, to anything but

indeed, to anything but

conventional warfare was unprecedented.

The burden of proof in a case like this is with the insurance company.

Cyber attacks are notoriously difficult to attribute, and even evidence collected by cyber-security companies may not be convincing to a court.

In this particular case, however, Zurich can refer to a number of official statements by Western governments describing NotPetya as part of a Russian hostile action against Ukraine. But, as is usual with disclosures from intelligence agencies, no proof was offered to back up the accusation.

The lawsuit raises the question of whether the claims from official sources should be admissible as evidence, even when they lack substantiation.

The US and other governments should think hard about whether the questionable benefits they get from the public accusations are worth the potential fallout: What if courts and lawyers actually start believing the cyberwar narrative and acting as if any damage caused to Western companies is uninsurable war damage?

Does the language of war really provide a good description of the current cyberspace rivalries? What will happen to the insurance of cyber risks if any attack could potentially be declared part of a war? Perhaps it's time to tone it down, or at least think twice before using such strong language.

BLOOMBERG

BIG PICTURE



Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 33 deg C Low 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 36 to 51 (Moderate)



PHOTO: REUTERS

Encounters of the icy kind

Some strange characters landed on Lake Oransee in Berlin, Germany, on Saturday.

From angels to astronauts, to even this man dressed as an alien, they drew curious stares from passers-by as they waded in the icy waters of the lake. The fancy dress party was for a carnival organised by the Berliner Seehunde, or Berlin Seals.

The Berlin Seals is an ice swimming club which regularly organises dips in Lake Oransee during the winter months.

Brave swimmers turn up to plunge into the lake, where temperatures dip below 7 deg C. To keep swimmers safe, each session is timed according to the temperature of the water – at one minute per degree.

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BUSINESS



NELSON NG HSUEH CHIN
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Co-working space sector feels the squeeze

Smaller local players struggling to stay afloat in saturated market

Derek Wong

Ms Saranta Gattie and her brother Ben were riding the tailwinds of co-working, a concept where paying members work in open-plan office spaces that often have an entrepreneurial and millennial vibe.

In just five months, their location in Keong Saik was full after opening in March 2015. A month later, it broke even. In two years, the profits were rolling in.

The founders of The Working Capitol (TWC) sensed something bigger and went for it.

The result was 55,000 sq ft across 11 floors in a gleaming glass tower at 140 Robinson Road - the largest co-working space in the Central Business District (CBD) when it opened in 2017.

Then things unravelled. A disagreement with the general contractor for the outlet resulted in TWC ceding control of the space there last year.

"To be honest, it was just too ambitious," Ms Gattie told The Straits Times. "With Robinson, part of it was (that) time was a bit against us

- there was financial pressure." Now, the firm is less interested in a multi-site expansion strategy, added Ms Gattie, who is in her early 30s. The initial aim was to expand to as many as five locations.

Instead, the plan now is to build on its niche in heritage buildings in Keong Saik, currently the company's only co-working location.

Many co-working spaces like TWC have cheery and well-lit interiors. The outlook for the industry may have looked similarly optimistic a few years back. However, it has taken a darker turn for some smaller operators here as they struggle to keep afloat in an increasingly saturated market.

The number of co-working operators in Singapore almost doubled from 19 in 2014 to 36 last year. It was the same for the number of co-working spaces, increasing from 66 to 120 in the same period, according to research by real estate services firm Cushman & Wakefield.

But the reality is not as rosy - at least 10 co-working spaces have shut down in the past 12 to 18 months, according to real estate services firm CBRE.

These have all been standalones, each smaller than 10,000 sq ft, which is the size of about 10 four-room flats.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

Given the relatively small scale of Singapore's office market, there is probably room for only a handful of key market leaders.

“

MR DESMOND SIM, CBRE head of research for Singapore and South-east Asia, who predicts consolidation in the co-working sector over the next three to five years as the market matures.

“

IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS, WE FORESEE THE DEMAND FOR CO-WORKING SPACES WILL CONTINUE TO GROW.

“

JUSTCO CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER KONG WAN SING

CONSOLIDATION

This is likely to signal more consolidation in the industry, say property experts, who anticipate rough seas for smaller local players amid aggressive expansion by well-funded overseas firms. They include the world's biggest co-working space provider, United States company WeWork, which is valued in the billions.

Mr Desmond Sim, CBRE head of research for Singapore and South-east Asia, predicts consolidation in the sector over the next three to five years as the market matures.

"Given the relatively small scale of Singapore's office market, there is probably room for only a handful of key market leaders," he said, adding that the top five co-working players should make up more than 70 per cent of total market share by the year end.

One of the heavy hitters is home-grown company JustCo, which has 13 co-working spaces here, with two more to open this year.

"In the next few years, we foresee the demand for co-working spaces will continue to grow," said JustCo chief executive officer Kong Wan Sing, who is in his early 40s.

A joint investment of US\$177 million (\$239 million) with Singapore's sovereign wealth fund GIC and property group Frasers Property has enabled JustCo to gun for an Asian empire. It aims to have 100 centres in the region by 2020 and already has a presence in cities such as Sydney, Beijing and Bangkok.

Cushman & Wakefield senior director and head of research Christine Li pointed to the importance of scale in operations, which gives big players a distinct advantage in providing more services and events, as well as in pricing out smaller firms.

Boutique operators try to maintain an edge by providing niche concepts and targeting a certain

clientele, but this has still proved futile for some.

Woolf Works, a women-only space in Carpenter Street, closed down last April after three years. Its final notification on its website is telling: "The Singapore co-working market is exploding and it's time for us to cut our losses and leave the others to fight it out."

Another space that has closed is Clockwork, a no-frills co-working space meant to maximise the use of art-house cinema The Projector.

The cinema's founder, Ms Karen Tan, told The Straits Times in 2017 that Clockwork charged "pretty much half the market rate", with monthly fees starting at \$140.

PRICE WAR

Competing on price may be a race to the bottom, yet it is still common to see companies offering free month-long passes or discounts of up to 90 per cent to draw customers.

A price war is something TWC's Ms Gattie is keen to steer clear of as she does not want to devalue its product. Nonetheless, she said TWC has made a "couple of downward revisions" in its prices since opening. "Pricing (in the market) is not where it was when we first opened," she said.

It was an especially acute sticking point when TWC was in Robinson Road, where a few other co-working spaces were located.

"You had prospective clients coming up to you to say, 'Well, that guy is giving me \$50 (rental), why can't you do it?'" said Ms Gattie.

Cushman & Wakefield's Ms Li pointed to the unsustainable nature of offering huge discounts, especially with costs such as rentals and marketing.

"If they (co-working firms) can't get the occupancy needed to break even, they might be in trouble," she said, noting that co-working spaces require an occupancy of 70 per cent to 80 per cent to be profitable.

In addition, cash flow for operators may be volatile as co-working tenants are often on daily or monthly leases.

Ms Gattie tries to address this by having different streams of revenue. Co-working clients contribute about 60 per cent of TWC's revenue, while about 30 per cent comes from space rented out to food and beverage outlets at the location.

BIGGER CLIENTS

Another way co-working firms try to stabilise cash flow is to go for bigger corporate clients, who usually opt for longer leases than start-ups.

For example, American employment search engine Indeed.com is taking up 150 desks at WeWork Beach Centre, while another US firm, interior design company Wilson Associates, has a 10,000 sq ft space for up to 200 employees at JustCo's Marina Square branch. In fact, corporations make up about 60 per cent to 70 per cent of JustCo's clients.

This may pit co-working operators against traditional landlords as they look to appeal to corporations rather than smaller businesses.

"They are effectively taking market share from traditional landlords, just as how Uber or Grab was replacing the role of public transport companies," said Cushman & Wakefield's Ms Li.

But Mr Kong was quick to play down such rivalry. "We are a partner rather than a competitor to the

DEVELOPERS JOIN IN continued on C2

Growing co-working market bolstering office rentals

Besides providing hip and cosy work locations, co-working spaces are also shaking up the real estate scene by bolstering office rentals.

Aggressive expansion plans by big co-working operators such as WeWork, along with the proliferation of boutique firms, have driven demand for office spaces in Singapore, strengthening office rentals, which rose 10 per cent last year.

According to property services provider Cushman & Wakefield, co-working spaces made up 21 per cent of overall office demand islandwide last year, up from 15 per cent in 2017.

The firm's senior director and head of research, Ms Christine Li, said that while it is hard to judge the direct effect of co-working spaces on office rentals, it can be deduced

that rents will be pushed up when office space is taken by co-working operators, given demand-supply logic.

"They take space off the market, usually signing leases for 10 to 15 years. For landlords leasing out these to one or two floors, they tend to be more aggressive with the remaining space (in the building) and hold on to the asking rents."

Ms Li said this would be especially for Grade A offices in the Central Business District, as the upcoming supply of office space is thin.

Mr Desmond Sim, head of research for Singapore and South-east Asia at CBRE, agreed it is plausible that rental costs have been increased by the presence of co-working spaces, though, he said, demand

has also been boosted by other industries such as the growing tech sector.

"Co-working spaces in the past 12 months have been a good source of demand for office landlords, with strong expansion plans from the big (co-working) players," he said, adding that co-working spaces generally pay market prices for the office rentals, with basic incentives similar to those for most other tenants.

He agreed that the increased occupancy emboldens building owners to ask for higher rents on remaining units. Mr Sim said those who may be hurt are investors who own strata-tile space, as small firms opt for longer-term leases with such investors.

According to CBRE, the co-working market size here was about 1.4 million sq ft as of the end of last

year. CBRE expects the market to expand by 50 per cent this year to more than 2 million sq ft, from about 1.4 million sq ft as of the end of last year, according to CBRE.

Nonetheless, the effect of co-working spaces on the real estate market should not be overstated.

About 1 million sq ft of such spaces

is located in office buildings - only about 1.6 per cent of the office stock in Singapore, said Mr Sim.

However, it may also mean that more expansion is in store, especially as more players invest in the co-working scene. Big developers are adapting their strategies to muscle in on the co-working landscape.

CapitaLand took a 50 per cent stake in co-working operator The Work Project Kingdom last October, while Keppel Land has created its own co-working brand, Kloud.

These developments come amid greater government recognition of the need for flexible work spaces in a changing, more fluid economy.

A 2014 initiative by the Infocomm Media Development Authority saw Smart Work Centres - pay-

per-use workspaces with meeting rooms, Wi-Fi and photocopiers - set up at three public libraries here.

Industrial developer JTC Corporation is also keen to support the implementation of co-working spaces.

Mr Lim Junwei, director of the infocomm media and start-up cluster at the agency, said: "While JTC has not invested in co-working spaces, we are open to working with co-working operators that are interested in bringing their expertise and business into JTC estates."

He added that JTC is currently working with co-working operators such as UCommune and Bash, who also provide programmes to support the start-up ecosystem at one-north.

Derek Wong

50%

Estimated expansion of the co-working market size in Singapore this year, to more than 2 million sq ft, from about 1.4 million sq ft as of the end of last year, according to CBRE.

Nonetheless, the effect of co-working spaces on the real estate market should not be overstated.

About 1 million sq ft of such spaces



Mr Prasad Raj borrowed \$50,000 through Funding Societies to renovate his eatery in 2017 after banks turned him down. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

More turn to crowdfunding to finance business needs

Peer-to-peer crowd-investing platforms in S'pore seeing rapid growth in recent years

Aw Cheng Wei

Banks gave restaurateur Prasad Raj the cold shoulder when he asked to borrow \$50,000 to renovate his Indian vegetarian eatery in Syed Alwi Road, so he turned to a far more accommodating source of financing – crowdfunding.

He approached Funding Societies with his request in late 2017 and it lent him the money, which he paid back in just six months. It was a pleasing outcome after the banks rejected his loan application because he was considered too old.

Mr Raj, now 65, said: "The banks (I approached) were rigid, and they had to adhere to many regulations."

Last November, when he needed another \$50,000 to tide his restaurant over tough times after it moved to Race Course Road, he turned to Funding Societies, which again loaned him the cash.

There are many similar stories as peer-to-peer crowd-investing platforms such as Funding Societies, Capital Match and Kapital Boost expand here. They are online marketplaces where groups or individuals can choose what projects to back.

The market in Singapore was worth US\$90.6 million (S\$122.6 million) last year, up 89.5 per cent on 2017, said Associate Professor Lawrence Loh at NUS Business School. The sector is tipped to have a cumulative annual growth rate of 52.2 per cent over the next few years, reaching US\$486.1 million by 2022, he wrote in an opinion piece The Straits Times ran in November.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore noted in its latest Financial Sta-

How crowd-investing works

When Funding Societies approves a project to be listed on its crowd-investing platform, its investors are notified of the investment option through its mobile app.

Investors can then decide whether they want to lend the company money based on information such as the reason for its financing need, target amount, interest rate, credit rating by credit bureau DP Info Group, and business summary. Amounts can start as low as \$20.

A Funding Societies spokesman said companies have to submit statements on its finan-

cial health before they can be listed on its platform.

"We reject seven out of 10 applications," said Mr Kelvin Teo, co-founder and chief executive of Funding Societies.

A credit team will run checks to determine the company's viability and the loan amount it can qualify for.

Once the company has reached its target goal, Funding Societies will visit the firm again to ensure its legitimacy before it disburses the money. The loan can be transferred on the same day.

Aw Cheng Wei

ability Review that "in recent years, crowdfunding has emerged as an alternative source of financing for start-ups and (small and medium-sized enterprises)" though banks hold a healthy slice of the market.

The number of loans Capital Match disbursed shot up to more than 1,600 last year, totalling over \$52 million, an increase from the 796 loans totalling \$38 million in 2017. The number of investors who put in money at least once a year increased from 463 in 2016 to around 700 last year.

Funding Societies lent about \$243 million last year, up from the \$3 million in 2015, when it began operations in June that year. Last year, it funded 55,980 projects, up from the 30 in 2015. It funded 270 projects in 2016 with \$19 million,

and 1,460 projects in 2017 with \$78 million. The average loan size was about \$120,000, said co-founder and chief executive Kelvin Teo.

Funding Societies had 50,800 new investors last year, up from the 890 in 2015 and 30,000 in 2017.

Those who turned to crowd-investing said their first choice was to borrow from the banks as the interest rates are lower and they are given more time to pay off the debt. Short-term bank loans can last between one and five years, while loans from crowd-investing sites typically do not go beyond a year.

Banks charge about 7 per cent a year in interest while crowd-investing sites can levy 9 to 18 per cent. But taking a bank loan is not always an available option, they added, as Mr Raj can attest.

awcw@sph.com.sg



Mr Nelson Ng Hsueh Chin has borrowed about \$200,000 through Funding Societies for his business of importing snacks to sell at pop-up events here. He has paid off most of the loans. ST PHOTO: KHALID BABA

Developers dive into co-working sphere too

FROM C1

landlord... We help pool numerous tenants under one roof, and these tenants are pre-qualified by us to ensure legitimacy and fit," he said.

"When landlords just work with us (instead of managing multiple tenants), they also transfer the non-payment risk to us."

Mr Kong is also aware of the need to stay onside with landlords. "Strong partnerships with landlords help us get to the market fast, and at prime locations that members prefer," he said. "It is crucial for all co-working providers and it is how JustCo is winning."

DEVELOPERS JOIN IN

However, property developers are not just standing around as co-working firms dive in. They, too, want a share.

Last May, Mapletree opened its own co-working space, CoQoos, in HarbourFront.

Asked about the challenges in setting up such a space, a Mapletree spokesman acknowledged that CoQoos was opening at a time "when the larger co-working operators were ramping up their number of locations in Singapore and marketing aggressively".

However, he added: "As a Mapletree outfit, we have the advantage of tapping our reach to current tenants."

Other developers that have entered the co-working sphere include CapitaLand, City Developments and Keppel Land.

Meanwhile, businesses are relishing the plethora of co-working options.

Mr Jay Teo, international director for iCHEF SG, which provides restaurant management systems, looked at about four or five co-working spaces before he settled on a location for his four employees three years ago. His main considerations were location, privacy and budget.

Some businesses see their co-working spaces becoming part of a transition – intended or otherwise – to permanent locations.

Mr Lim Chong Tee, chief marketing officer for water innovation company WateROAM, and his team of about 10 moved out of a co-working space last October.

With growing research and development and operational needs, the start-up is now at a leased space at one-north charging more than double the previous rental.

Mr Lim said: "The co-working space we were at had a very conducive and friendly environment. But due to the nature of our work, which involved hardware prototyping, there were times we might have disturbed others."

"With our own home now, it is easier to tinker with tools and organise internal discussions without disturbing others."

WateROAM spent an initial capital outlay of between \$30,000 and \$50,000 to do up the new office, an expense it could have saved on if it had opted for a co-working space. However, Mr Lim feels it is well worth it for a space he and his team can call their own.

GROWTH, BUT NOT FOR ALL

Nonetheless, the thirst for co-working spaces has not been satisfied just yet.

According to CBRE's Mr Sim, there is still considerable interest in the sector, which will support growth for the next couple of years. He estimates the market to expand by another 50 per cent this year to more than 2 million sq ft.

Mr Duncan White, head of office services at commercial real estate service firm Colliers International, also predicts robust growth, but expects more co-working locations outside of the CBD.

Not all co-working firms will partake in this growth.

Looking ahead, Ms Gattie said TWC is in the process of rediscovering its strengths and has no immediate plans to expand.

"Last year was to recuperate. Getting out of Robinson was quite a big hit for us... We are focusing on our campus here in Keong Saik for now."

wderek@sph.com.sg

\$52m

Total value of the more than 1,600 loans disbursed by Capital Match last year, an increase from the 796 loans totalling \$38 million in 2017. The number of investors who put in money at least once a year increased from 463 in 2016 to around 700 last year.

89.5%

Percentage increase in value of crowdfunding market in Singapore from 2017 to last year, according to Associate Professor Lawrence Loh at NUS Business School.

Second Chance shut almost all boutiques in Malaysia



Second Chance Properties chief executive Salleh Marican said it was better to close the First Lady boutiques than continue with steep losses. ST FILE PHOTO

Second Chance Properties (SCP) has closed all its First Lady boutiques in Malaysia except for one megastore in Kuala Lumpur.

The move was taken to reduce losses, SCP chief executive officer Salleh Marican told Singapore's Berita Harian daily.

Last year, SCP closed the remaining eight First Lady boutiques across Malaysia, including those in Johor state and Kuala Lumpur. This was a far cry from its heyday five years ago, when it had 48 First Lady boutiques in Malaysia.

"The user's taste has changed. When we opened First Lady 15 years ago, most Malay women wore baju kurung (traditional Malay dress)," Mr Salleh said.

"These days, Malay women, including those who wear the hijab (Muslim headdress), prefer Western clothes and they buy clothes from brands like H&M and Mango. Online businesses also affected

our business."

He added: "Rather than continuing with steep losses, it is better to close the boutiques."

The ringgit's depreciation against the Singapore dollar also affected First Lady's earnings.

Still, SCP is maintaining First Lady's flagship store, which is located in a 10-storey building that it owns in the popular Masjid India shopping area in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur.

Half of this building is used as the retail outlet. The other half is used as offices and stores and has been rented out to other companies.

Mainboard-listed SCP recently announced that its net profit for the first quarter ending Nov 30 had plunged by 90 per cent to \$218,000, compared with a \$2.23 million profit in the same period last year.

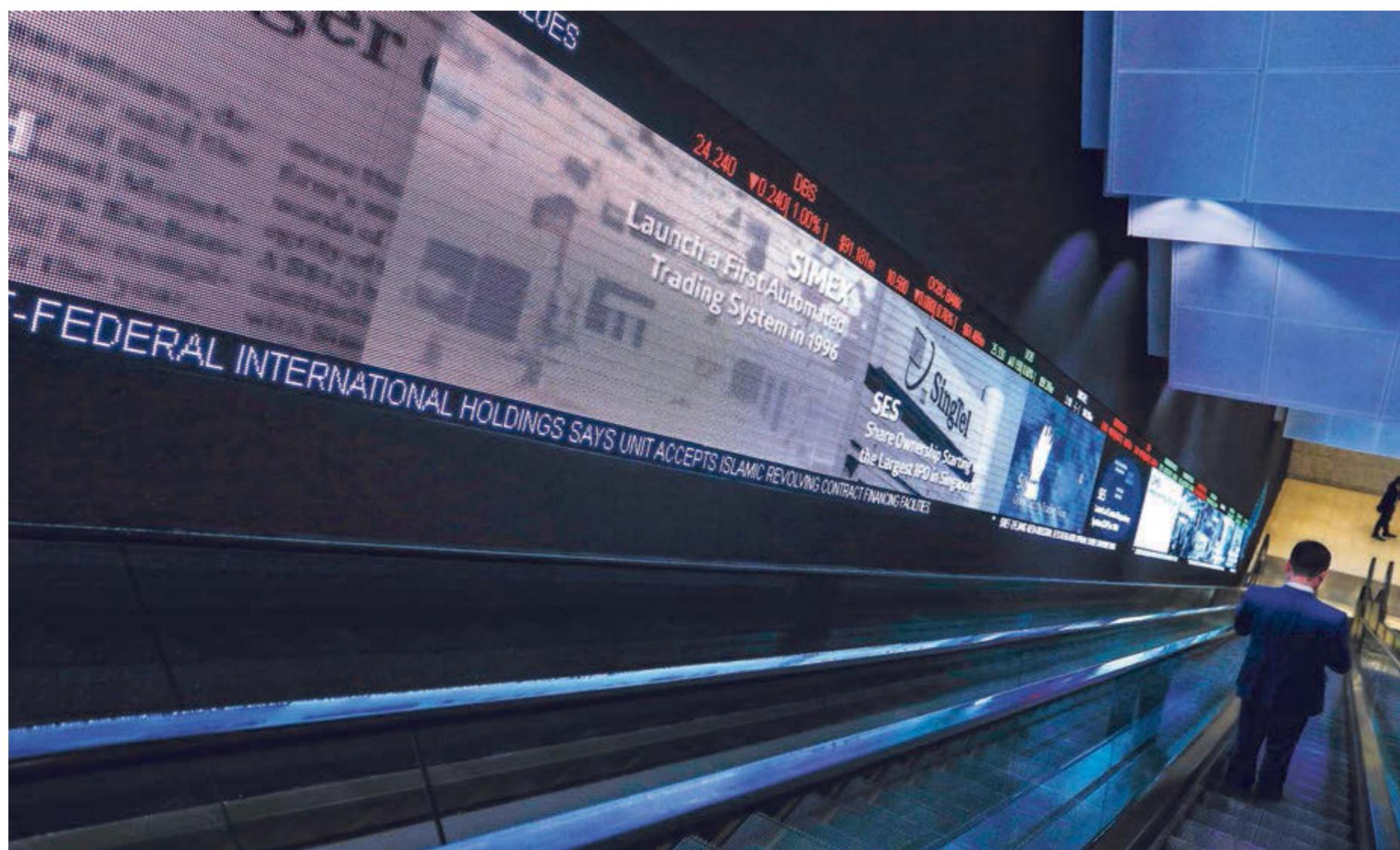
Speaking to Berita Harian, a Singapore Press Holdings publica-

tion, Mr Salleh said: "In Singapore, the First Lady boutique in Tanjong Katong Complex is also facing challenges due to the fierce competition from online retailers."

"But it is still profitable, though (not as much as) in previous years. In the past, we could earn \$1 million from the First Lady boutique but now, we can make only around \$200,000."

He added that the company's gold business, Golden Chance, was still profitable, with \$340,000 profit in the first quarter ended Nov 30 last year, 2.86 per cent lower than in the same comparable period. Its real estate business posted a profit of \$1.51 million, down by \$490,000 due to lower rental income.

SCP has several property units, including 12 at Sim Lim Square, 22 at City Plaza, and others in Peninsula Plaza, Lucky Plaza, Bedok and Toa Payoh.



Ms Kum Soek Ching, head of South-east Asia research at Credit Suisse's private banking arm, recommends that investors in Singapore maintain a portfolio of "quality, high-yield stocks", such as banks and Singapore Reits, and "stocks with low embedded expectations" to ride out any volatility this year. ST FILE PHOTO

MarketsInsights

Stock market faces test of earnings season

Analysts expect bourse's upward momentum to be dulled by less rosy growth prospects

Lynette Tan

Supportive developments on the US-China trade and US Fed policy fronts gave markets some cheer last week, but a recovery is still a work in progress.

This week, dimmer corporate earnings growth may add a dash of unwanted spice to an already heady cocktail. The fourth-quarter earn-

ings season takes place in the United States, starting with major banks. In the light of corporates like tech stalwart Apple and retail giant Macy's lowering guidance for the quarter, analysts say banking stocks may also be put to the test.

What is also important to watch is the CEOs' outlook for this year, which will drive markets.

Mr Olivier d'Assier, head of Asia-Pacific research at Axioma, says rising uncertainty has lowered confidence in earnings forecasts, while the surge in volatility has made being wrong that much more costly.

As such, investors will pay very close attention to the CEOs' guid-

ance and "any signs that CEOs are lowering guidance for 2019 will send investors running for safety".

In Singapore, analysts expect the market's upward momentum to be dulled by less rosy economic and corporate earnings growth prospects. But longer-term investors can still find value, given local stocks' cheap valuations and attractive dividend yields, the analysts say.

Ms Kum Soek Ching, head of South-east Asia research at Credit Suisse's private banking arm, says the below-historical average market price-to-earnings of 11.4 times (based on 2019 forecast earnings) and 4.4 per cent dividend yield make an attractive risk-reward proposition for longer-term investors.

She recommends that investors here maintain a portfolio of "quality, high-yield stocks", such as banks and Singapore Reits, and "stocks with low embedded expectations" to ride out any volatility this year.

After a broad-based slowdown in loan growth in the third quarter, United Overseas Bank (UOB) and OCBC Bank have guided for mid-to-high single-digit growth. Similarly, DBS Bank has guided for mid-single-digit growth this year as demand for mortgages and trade finance softens.

But Ms Kum believes earnings expectations have not bottomed out for banks. There is still room for

margins to expand, she adds, as US rates rise (Credit Suisse expects two rate hikes this year) and loan repricing continues with a lag.

On the data front, the focus for Singapore will be the December non-oil domestic exports data on Thursday.

UOB's economics research team expects another month of decline, by 1.9 per cent year on year, compared with last November's decline of 2.6 per cent year on year.

Other data releases include China's trade data. With the official private Caixin manufacturing purchasing managers' index having fallen into contractionary territory, consensus is for slower growth in exports and imports last month.

The US will release December retail sales and industrial production data tomorrow.

Citi economists are expecting slower industrial production growth. Signs of moderation could deal a blow to the markets alongside potentially poor earnings data.

The UK House of Commons will be voting on Prime Minister Theresa May's European Union-endorsed Brexit deal. Her withdrawal deal is widely expected to be voted down.

The partial US government shutdown, in its fourth week, will likely continue.

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SME business optimism dips for 3rd straight quarter

Business sentiment among Singapore small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) eased again for the third quarter in a row, even as they remained marginally optimistic about the outlook for the first six months of this year.

The latest Singapore Business Federation (SBF) - DP Info SME Index score fell slightly from 51 to 50.7, indicating an increase in caution among the 3,600 SMEs polled between October and November last year. But despite the downturn, a score above 50 still signals an expectation of growth.

The sector that showed the biggest decline in sentiment was construction and engineering, followed by retail and food and beverage, and transport and storage.

Turnover expectations by SMEs continued to decline on the back of an uncertain macroeconomic environment, down from 5.22 to 5.13. This directly impacted profitability expectations, which also fell from 5.19 to 5.07.

A score above five indicates expectations of an increase, while a score below that indicates possible decline.

Among the sectors, construction and engineering, commerce and trading, and manufacturing are anticipating negative profit growth.

The study also showed softer capital investment expectations for the next six months, which fell from 5.21 to 5.16, as SMEs take a wait-and-see approach in view of the murky outlook ahead.

This coincides with companies holding back capital investment commitments ahead of possible changes in government initiatives and schemes in the upcoming Budget 2019, according to the report.

SMEs are still looking for opportunities to grow, even as business expansion expectations dipped from 5.45 to 5.41 for the first half of this year.

In particular, SMEs in the business services sector and the transport and storage sector are expecting to expand - likely a result of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which came into force on Dec 30 last year, as well as the signing of the Asean e-commerce agreements.

Mr Ho Meng Kit, chief executive officer of SBF, noted that it was a relief to see that the appetite for business expansion is "still healthy", even as the survey was conducted at the height of the US-China trade tensions.

"Given the ongoing trade tensions and slower economic growth climate, it is even more pertinent that our companies stay nimble and are quick to take advantage of opportunities that may arise from the diversion of trade and reshuffling of global supply chains."

He said businesses should continue to innovate and transform, as well as tap the extensive network of free trade agreements that Singapore has signed.

Mr James Gothard, general manager of credit services and strategy for South-east Asia at DP Info's parent Experian, added: "SMEs are likely to look forward to supporting measures announced in Budget 2019 to overcome near-term challenges, as well as enable them to capture future opportunities."

Amazon developing Netflix-like service for video games: Report

WASHINGTON • Amazon is planning to use its massive cloud computing services to jump into the streaming market for video game play, according to a new report from The Information.

A successful streaming platform could upend the longstanding business model of the gaming world.

As Netflix did with TV shows and movies, and Spotify did with music, a gaming platform could offer customers a wider universe of content through a monthly subscription, while giving game studios a steady revenue stream and a broader pool of potential customers.

But big-name game publishers

may be reluctant to dive in, since such a model would force them to relinquish some control over the distribution of their property and would alter how they divvy up their proceeds.

The service, which could bring top-notch titles to virtually anyone with a smartphone or streaming device, could make Amazon a major competitor in the space already in play by Microsoft and Google.

While most big-budget video games require users to own a gaming console or a computer to run, Amazon's reported streaming service would live on the tech giant's cloud network, freeing customers to play elaborate, robust games even on their mobile devices, the report said. The service is slated to

launch next year, the report added.

The development of a Web-based gaming hub would mark a significant foray for Amazon. Other big tech companies are advancing their own efforts to claim territory in the new game-streaming market, including Microsoft and Google.

Amazon has already approached game publishers to consider bringing their content to the streaming service, according to the report.

Amazon did not immediately respond to a request for comment. (Amazon chief executive Jeff Bezos owns The Washington Post.)

In an October unveiling for Project xCloud, a service that would enable developers to place

their Xbox games on any device, the head of Microsoft's gaming cloud division described grand ambitions.

"Our vision for the evolution of gaming is similar to music and movies - entertainment should be available on demand and accessible from any screen," wrote Mr Karim Choudry in a company blog post. Google has also jumped into the race to develop a gaming service that transcends the home console, dubbed Project Stream.

Amazon has its advantages. In addition to its massive online store and direct access to a broad set of Internet customers, the company leads the global cloud computing industry, commanding 32 per cent of the market, compared with Micro-

soft Azure's 17 per cent and Google Cloud's 8 per cent.

Through its Twitch subsidiary, the rapidly growing live video streaming service that focuses on video games, Amazon also oversees a thriving community of passionate gamers, some of whom are enjoying mainstream success and elevated cultural cache.

More than one million people are watching Twitch streams at any given time, according to the company's overview of last year's figures.

And the number of people who broadcast their video game play, music, commentary and everyday theatrics jumped from two million in 2017 to more than three million last year. *WASHINGTON POST*

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WEEKLY



Straits Times Index stocks

	52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY	LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
286	245	245	Ascendas Reit	SGD	268	+5	65914	6	13
200	161	161	CapitaCom Trust	SGD	182	+2	47330	4.8	1
388	298	298	CapitaLand	SGD	327	+21	41547	3.7	0.7
238	195	195	CapitaMall Trust	SGD	232	+2	69229	4.8	11
1360	780	780	CityDev	SGD	890	+82	12669	2	0.8
251	196	196	ComfortDelGro	SGD	216	+1	36369	4.8	5.8
3128	2265	2265	DBS Grp	USD	2478	+149	18582	5.8	14
368	767	767	DairyFarm USD	USD	268	+18	30131	2.3	0.2
141	85.5	85.5	GenSing Sing	SGD	104	+5	146926	3.4	16
39	225	225	Golden Agri-Res	SGD	26	+15	55973	3.1	0.6
42	23	23	HPH Trust USD	USD	26	+15	26860	10.1	0.4
744	588	588	HongkongLand USD	USD	1692	+32	10678	2.9	0.7
6974	5580	5580	JMH USD	USD	6810	-47	1360	2.4	0.7
4149	3155	3155	JSB USD	USD	3800	+51	812	0.8	0.4
4045	2768	2768	Jardine C&C	SGD	3681	+93	3068	3.1	18
892	567	567	Kellog Corp	USD	628	+1	1662	3.5	0.7
1404	1036	1036	OCBC Bank	SGD	1165	+48	26100	3.2	12
585	455	455	SATS	SGD	491	+25	10473	3.7	34
850	672	672	SGX	SGD	729	+10	8136	4.1	83
1184	914	914	SIA	SGD	971	+44	8926	4.1	0.8
292	231	231	SPH	SGD	249	+13	27615	5.2	12
370	319	319	ST Engineering	SGD	357	+10	16360	4.2	24
360	223	223	Sembcorp Ind	SGD	244	+17	1711	1.8	0.7
365	283	283	Singtel	SGD	305	+15	10280	6.7	17
945	575	575	ThaiBev	SGD	68cd	+7	235238	0.9	33
3037	2380	2380	UOB	SGD	2609	+71	12037	3.8	13
938	591	591	UOL	SGD	663	+55	7721	2.6	0.6
2965	1320	1320	Venture Corp	SGD	1504	+133	7027	4	19
331	297	297	Wilmar Intl	SGD	324	+11	29406	3.1	0.9
166	84	84	YZJ Shipbdg SGD	SGD	130	+3	93777	3.5	0.9

FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

	52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY	LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
286	245	245	AIMSAMP Cap Reit	SGD	145	129	1776	7.5	1
200	161	161	Accordia Golf Tr	SGD	71	48	3758	7	0.6
388	298	298	Ascendas-hTrust	SGD	90.5	74	2589	0.8	0.8
238	195	195	Ascendas-iTrust	SGD	105	+1	3255	5.8	12
1360	780	780	Asian Pay TV Tr	SGD	13.4	-0.2	11969	485	0.2
251	196	196	Banyan Tree	SGD	59.5	122	1926	17	0.8
3128	2265	2265	Best World	SGD	264	-10	18872	16	9.4
368	767	767	Boustead	SGD	80	+1	180	3.8	12
141	85.5	85.5	BreadTalk	SGD	875	+6	1579	8	2.3
39	225	225	Bukit Semawang	SGD	567	+2	322	3.2	12
42	23	23	Cache Log Trust	SGD	73	+3.5	9409	99	1
744	588	588	Centurion	SGD	36.5	395	1204	6.2	0.7
6974	5580	5580	China Aviation	SGD	115	+9	8621	3.9	1
4149	3155	3155	China Everbright	SGD	135	+1	1150	16	0.6
1404	1036	1036	China Sunshine	SGD	133	+11	5633	2.3	15
585	455	455	Chip Eng Seng	SGD	70.5	+4.5	14434	57	0.6
892	567	567	Cosco	SGD	36.5	+2.5	32144	-	16
177	101	101	Delong	SGD	601	-7	118	-	0.6
141	85.5	85.5	Duty Free Int'l	SGD	21cd	+1.4	1044	8.8	13
236	211	211	EC World Reit	SGD	70	+0.5	2944	8.6	0.8
117	101	101	ESR-REIT	SGD	54	+3	40889	71	0.9
141	85.5	85.5	First Reit	SGD	104	+5.5	3114	82	1
323	223	223	Frasers Com Tr	SGD	142	92	6472	6.8	0.9
236	211	211	Frasers HTrust	SGD	71	+0.5	3141	-	11
177	101	101	Geo Energy Res	SGD	19.3	+1.5	15273	52	11
1404	1036	1036	Health Mgt Int'l	SGD	70	52	248	0.6	5.3
59	44.5	44.5	Hi-Point	SGD	91	+5	40068	275	14
892	567	567	Hong Leong Fin	SGD	260	+4	397	5	0.6
133	108	108	IREIT Global	SGD	73.5	+1	435	8.1	1
215	151	151	Indofood Agri	SGD	21	+2	1810	-	0.2
273	170	170	Japfa	SGD	78	+25	12506	0.6	15
172	152	152	KSH	SGD	52	+15	408	42	0.9
236	184	184	Kep-KBS Reit USD	USD	79	+5	6512	-	0.6
128	118	118	Kepel DC Reit	SGD	139	+2	13680	51	1.4
128	107	107	Kepel T&T	SGD	185	-1	4073	19	0.7
133	108	108	KrisEnergy	SGD	8.5	+0.8	99237	-	1
215	151	151	Lian Beng	SGD	50	+3	2318	45	0.4
273	170	170	Lippo Malls Tr	SGD	425	+18	16139	16	0.8
172	152	152	MM2 Asia	SGD	33.5	+3.5	6095	-	19
128	118	118	Manulife Reit USD	USD	81	-0.5	2566	6.8	0.7
128	107	107	Metro	SGD	101	+1	472	5	0.6
128	107	107	Noble	SGD	81	susp	-	-	0.6
128	107	107	OUE Com Reit	SGD	48	+25	7368	97	0.5
128	107	107	PEC	SGD	57	+1	109	3.5	0.6
128	107	107	POSH	SGD	46	+18	811	-	0.6
128	107	107	QSM Dental	SGD	50	+0.5	947	32	

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*The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.
Isaiah 40:28*

**Koh Cheng Eng**

Age: 83

Was called home to the Lord on 13 January 2019.
Dearly missed and lovingly cherished by:

Wife: Betty

Sons:

Kenny
ColinGrandchildren:
Russell
Leomie
Sarah
RachelDaughters-in-law:
Josephine
Irene

And all relatives and friends.

Wake at 9 Cheng Soon Crescent, Singapore 599881.
Night services on Tuesday and Wednesday,
15 and 16 January 2019 at 8.00pm.Cortege leaves on Thursday 17 January 2019 at 11.00am
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 12.05pm.**SINGAPORE CASKET CO (PTE) LTD**
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**Veerapan Govindamal (Kannu)**

Age: 92

Passed away peacefully on 12 January 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Husband: M. Veerapan (deceased)

Sons:
Veerapan Visvanathan
Veerapan Balakrishnan
(Krishnaraj)
Veerapan Asogasivam

Daughters:
Veerapan Muthulethuchi
Veerapan Paruvathi
Veerapan Radhamani
Veerapan Sarojini

Sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, relatives and friends.
Amma is resting at Block 44 Telok Blangah Drive #09-17,
Singapore 100044. Tel: 6270 7628

Cortege leaves on Monday 14 January 2019 at 4.30pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 6.30pm.*"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want"***TEO KIM NEO MADELEINE**

Age: 69

passed away peacefully on 13 January 2019.

Dearly missed and fondly remembered by

Children:
Christopher Young
Karen Young

Daughter-in-law:
Jennifer Tan

Grandsons:
Joshua and Tristan Goo

Siblings:
James Teo and Christine
Pauline Hau and Timmy
Lena Sankaran
Patrick Teo and May May
Rosalind Hasnah

Nephews, Nieces, Relatives and Friends
Madeleine is resting at the Church of Nativity
1259 Upper Serangoon Road (S534795) from 9am to 11pm.

Funeral service on Thursday, 17 January 2019 at 1.15pm
thereafter to Mandai Crematorium for cremation at 2.45pm.**Seah Khung Img**

Age: 87

Passed away peacefully on 13 January 2019.

Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Brothers:
Dean Seah
Seah Seng Pau
Seah Hood Pau
Seah Thian Pau

Sisters:
Seah Khwong Kiang
Seah Khwong Yao
Seah Phek Liang
Seah Phek Hong
Seah Phek Mu

In-laws, nephews, nieces, all relatives and friends.
Wake at Block 38 Sin Ming Drive #01-543, Jade Hall,
Singapore 575712.

Cortege leaves on Wednesday 16 January 2019 at 2.30pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 3.30pm.**1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory of****Lim Lay Hian**

Departed on 14 January 2018

*The twinkle in your eyes. Laughter in your voice.
Understanding nod. Your enthusiasm.*

*Lay Hian, you are dearly missed but always
treasured in our hearts and minds.*

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*And in the sweetness of friendship let there be laughter.
and the sharing of pleasures.
For in the dear of little things the heart finds
its morning and is refreshed.*

Kahlil Gibran

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LOH CLAIMS BIGGEST SCALP

After beating China's Lin Dan, Kean Yew has his sights set on Tokyo Olympics

David Lee

His five victories over Chinese players earned him the nickname the "Chinese Slayer" by the online community during his fairy-tale run at the Thailand Masters, but that mantle does not sit comfortably with Singaporean shuttler Loh Kean Yew.

The 21-year-old world told The Straits Times: "It's unnecessary pressure, and not so nice, just call me by my name lah, aiyoh."

The world badminton fraternity will surely know his name by now after his stunning 21-19, 21-18 victory over Chinese legend Lin Dan in the men's singles final at the US\$150,000 (\$202,000) Princess Sirivannavari Thailand Masters in Bangkok yesterday.

Loh, who entered the encounter with just four lower-tier titles to his name, compared with Lin's 65 that include two Olympic golds and five world titles, took the game to the 35-year-old veteran from the off, directing a smash at the world No. 13's body that went unreturned to earn the first point.

While the Chinese used his experience and moments of magic to open up leads in each game, Loh refused to be intimidated, staying patient, chasing lost causes for precious points and continuing to play an aggressive game. It paid off.

"It is an honour to play against Lin Dan. This has been my dream since I was young," said Loh. "He has good touches and is very calm on court. I was nervous, and tried my best to cope with the situation. I just kept telling myself to stay focused."

"Both of us had played many long games and I think my younger age helped me recover faster than him and I was able to outrun him."

There was no time to celebrate with his US\$11,250 winner's cheque, however. Hours after the biggest win of his career, Loh was off to Denmark, where he has a league game today for Langhøj Badminton Club, whom he is contracted to until the end of this month.

In the longer term, the 2015 SEA Games men's singles bronze medalist is aiming for another podium fin-



ish at the Asean meet this year, as well as qualification for next year's Olympics. He added: "My targets are not going to change just because I won a tournament. It is important to be consistent. Winning Olympic gold has been my dream and this has not changed too."

This is the first time Loh has reached the final of a Level 5 (Super 300) tournament on the Badminton World Federation's World Tour and won.

Ranked 125th, Loh had eliminated China's Sun Feixiang (121st), Liu Haichao (229th), Zhou Ziqi (56th) and Zhao Junpeng (47th) in the earlier rounds. In the quarter-fi-

OUTRUNNING 'SUPER DAN'

It is an honour to play against Lin Dan. This has been my dream ... I think my younger age helped me recover faster... and I was able to outrun him.

LOH KEAN YEW, on beating the Chinese legend.

nal, he beat Chinese Taipei's Wang Tzu-wei (29th), before taming 30th-ranked Frenchman Brice Leverdez in the semi-finals.

National singles coach Kelvin Ho said: "What Kean Yew did right was being able to be patient and focused, yet calm and daring to handle certain situations.

"He should take this win as motivation to study more of his own game and that of other world-class players, and continue to improve."

Singapore Badminton Association (SBA) president Lawrence Leow also hailed Loh's achievement, saying: "This achievement is especially remarkable as he just returned to

the national team last October after serving his national service.

"His win is a great encouragement for everyone on the national team. He has done well for Singapore and we are very proud of him. Kean Yew is one of our players who will be closely watched by others in the international scene."

There was more good news for the SBA as Danny Bawa Chrisnanta and Tan Wei Han won the Estonian International mixed doubles title after beating England's Gregory Mairs and Victoria Williams 21-18, 14-21, 21-15 yesterday.

davidlee@sph.com.sg

Loh Kean Yew en route to his 21-19, 21-18 victory over two-time Olympic champion Lin Dan in the Princess Sirivannavari Thailand Masters men's singles final in Bangkok yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF EDWIN LEUNG

Ikhsan focused on task as he begins Norway adventure

Singapore's Ikhsan Fandi has vowed to make an impact in Norway, after signing a two-year contract with Norwegian second-tier team Raufoss on Saturday.

The deal, worth a few thousand euros a month, made the 19-year-old the first local-born Singaporean international to join a European team in 30 years, and only the third to do so after V. Sundram Moorthy (FC Basel, 1988-89) and Ikhsan's fa-

ther, Fandi Ahmad (Groningen, 1983-1985).

Raufoss head coach Christian Johnsen told The Straits Times: "We decided to sign Ikhsan because he is a good young player with a positive mentality. We feel he has good tempo and potential. He needs to adapt to the new environment but we believe and hope that he will play many games for Raufoss."

Described by the club's website as a "robust and talented player" and "an exciting signing", Ikhsan told ST: "I'm over the moon to join Raufoss and I'm looking forward to improving my game and physique here, and help the team with my goals and assists."

He will return to Singapore for a one-week break before re-joining his new team, who will head to Spain for pre-season matches, before kicking off the new season at Nest-Sotra on March 31.

Raufoss, who are based an 80-minute drive from Norway's capital, Oslo, are not well known in Singapore, but they have more than a century of history. They last played in the top flight in 1974 and were promoted to the 1. divisjon after they won the 2. divisjon title last season. Their 2,500-seater

Nammo Stadion has a top-grade artificial pitch and a heated indoor arena for winter use.

Ikhsan has relished the challenge - Norway's sub-zero temperatures and all - from the get-go.

He said: "The experience was good from the first day. Raufoss is a small and quiet community where everyone seems to know everyone here. I hope soon they will get to know me! The players are very welcoming and we get along well. Everyone here speaks English."

"The training sessions were not difficult, but even the warm-up was intense and very coordinated."

"The team usually play a 4-3-3 system, which is good for me because I can play in any of those positions up front. Although they are physically strong, I don't think the Norwegian defenders are as huge as people think, and I'm confident of holding my own against them."

"I aim to make an impact here and continue to improve in all areas. I need to raise my fitness because the game here transitions very quickly from defence to attack. If I'm playing on the wing, I'm also expected to defend from the front."

Ikhsan is not the only Fandi playing his trade overseas this year. His older brother Irfan is in Thailand on

a one-year deal with Thai League 2 side Bangkok Glass.

Said Fandi, the national Under-22s coach: "I'm happy that both Irfan and Ikhsan are going to play overseas. I hope they get to play regular football, improve and are then able to contribute more."

"Hopefully, they can do well and inspire other young footballers here to work hard and venture abroad to become better players because the more we have playing in strong leagues, the stronger our national team will become."

Ikhsan enjoyed a breakthrough year in 2018, scoring five times in eight games for Singapore from September to November, including a bicycle-kick goal in the 6-1 AFF Cup win over Timor-Leste. He also netted eight times in 20 games for the Young Lions in the Singapore Premier League.

Johor Darul Takzim and Singapore captain Hariss Harun, who had trials and trained with Chinese Super League's Shanghai Shenhua and Spain's CE L'Hospitalet said the move would be "good for him (Ikhsan) and Singapore football".

But he noted that it would take Ikhsan some time to settle: "It is a totally different life. He has to get used to being far from his family



Ikhsan Fandi on trial with Raufoss against top-tier Norwegian club Mjondalen on Saturday. He is the first local-born Singaporean in 30 years to join a European football team.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIUS MYKLESET

and friends. Playing in Norway is totally different from playing in South-east Asia. He is thousands of kilometres away from his comfort zone, the culture and food are different, and there will be expectations to live up to on the pitch."

However, he was confident that the youngster would be able to ride

out the challenge. "Ikhsan has had experience living and training in Chile. He seems like a strong and determined footballer with bags of potential so I think he will do well with some good luck, good coaches and good team-mates."

David Lee

FOUR-DIGIT DRAW

Jan 13 2019

FIRST ♦ 2729
SECOND ♦ 7339
THIRD ♦ 7757

STARTERS

1453 2168 2367
3424 3427 3626
5251 5783 7282
9033

CONSOLATIONS

0209 0470 1298
1909 2446 2692
4872 6364 7369
8952

BAIHAKKI GETS FRESH SHOT AT THAI TOP TIER

Veteran Lion joins promoted Trat after whole season on loan at 2nd-division Udon Thani

David Lee

Less than three weeks before he turns 35 on Jan 31, national defender Baihakki Khaizan is counting his blessings after he signed a one-year contract with Thai League 1 side Trat FC on Friday.

The 1.89-metre centre-back moves from Thai giants Muangthong United and is looking forward to playing in the top tier after being sent on loan to Thai League 2 side Udon Thani, where he played in 23 league games and scored one goal as they finished sixth last season.

Trat were also in the second divi-

sion, but were promoted after finishing second behind PTT Rayong. The White Elephants play in the 6,000-seater Thai Province Stadium and are based in the coastal province of Trat, an hour's flight from Bangkok.

Baihakki told The Straits Times: "While I enjoyed myself at Udon Thani, I was disappointed at being loaned out to the second division as my mission was to play in T1."

"After a year of patience, I'm finally here and I hope to achieve something together with Trat. We may be a newly promoted team, but Trat have a decent squad and made some good signings."

"We take inspiration from Prachuap, who were promoted and finished sixth in T1 last season. Sure, there are giants like Buriram, Bangkok United and Muangthong, but T1 is also an exciting and unpredictable league, and we look forward to surprising people."

He has been one of Singapore's most travelled Lions in recent years, after winning the 2003 S-League Young Player of the Year award in his debut season with Geylang United.

From 2009 to 2012, he played for three big Indonesian clubs – Persija Jakarta, Persib Bandung and Medan Chiefs. Upon his return to Singapore, he won the Malaysian Super League with the Lions XII in 2013 before signing with Johor Darul Takzim the following year.

He played for Warriors FC in the

S-League for a season in 2017 before moving to Thailand last year. Singapore Premier League side Hougang United had been keen to sign him to beef up their defence, but he decided to go for a bigger challenge and pay packet overseas.

"I appreciate the interest from Hougang, and they gave me a good headache," said Baihakki.

"People assume many negative things about 35-year-old players but I feel I can still keep up with the modern game and go on, and I am thankful for teams who recognise and value my abilities."

"Nobody knows whether such an offer from a top-tier Thai side will come again, it could be my last chance and I must make full use of this to prove my worth."

Having played only 23 minutes in Singapore's failed AFF Suzuki Cup

RARING TO GO

After a year of patience, I'm finally here and I hope to achieve something together with Trat.



BAIHAKKI KHAIZAN, 34-year-old Singapore defender, on his latest challenge.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BAIHAKKI KHAIZAN

campaign in November, he hopes to add to his 134 caps after the Lions appoint their new head coach by next month. "It is always an honour to wear the national jersey, and I'm always available. But each coach has his own thinking so for now I can focus only on doing my best for Trat," he said.

Baihakki's deal means there are now four Singaporean footballers playing in Thailand, with Army United goalkeeper Hassan Sunny, Nong Bua Pitchaya custodian Izwan Mahbud and Bangkok Glass defender Irfan Fandi all in T2.

Over in Malaysia, national skipper and midfielder Hariss Harun

continues to captain MSL champions JDT after signing a contract extension in October that keeps him at the club until 2021, and utility player Safuan Baharudin is set to stay with FA Cup winners Pahang.

Defender Shakir Hamzah is a new addition to Kedah, who are under Singaporean coach Aidil Sharin, while winger Faris Ramli has joined second-division side Perlis from top-tier team PKNS FC.

Ihsan Fandi is the only Lion in Europe, having signed a two-year deal with Norwegian second-tier side Raufoss on Saturday.

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Japan's forward Takumi Minamino evading the attentions of Oman's Khalid Al-Braik during their Group F game at the Hazza bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi. Japan won 1-0.

PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE



Asian Cup 2019

Wasteful Japan squeeze through, Qatar hit N. Korea for 6

ABU DHABI • Genki Haraguchi smashed home a controversial penalty, as former champions Japan scraped a 1-0 Group F win over Oman to book their place in the last 16 of the Asian Cup yesterday.

Earlier, Almoez Ali plundered a record-equalling four goals for Qatar as the 2022 World Cup hosts hit North Korea for six unanswered goals to progress from Group E.

Japan, who have scooped Asian football's biggest prize on four occasions, enjoyed their share of good fortune in Abu Dhabi.

Haraguchi clipped the crossbar after just two minutes before fellow forward Takumi Minamino fluffed a handful of golden opportunities.

The opposition had extra reason to feel aggrieved, when their own penalty claims were waved away just before half-time after defender Yuto Nagatomo looked to have han-

from an acute angle.

However, Haraguchi settled Japan's nerves in the 28th minute, converting from the spot after he had appeared to go down easily under minimal contact from Oman captain Ahmed Al-Mahajiri.

The opposition had extra reason to feel aggrieved, when their own penalty claims were waved away just before half-time after defender Yuto Nagatomo looked to have han-

dled a Salah Al-Yahyaei drive.

Despite reaching the knockout stages of last year's World Cup, Japan's Asian Cup campaign has not been entirely convincing so far – they squeaked past Turkmenistan 3-2 in their opener – and were again poor on the night.

But despite a late scare when Raed Saleh's acrobatic late volley flashed wide, Japan remain unbeaten in seven matches since Ha-

jime Moriyasu took charge and have now reached the knockout phase of the Asian Cup for the eighth consecutive time.

In the earlier game, Qatar's romp over North Korea was played in almost eerie silence in front of barely 300 spectators in Al Ain.

The Sheikh Khalifa International Stadium was virtually empty due to the Gulf blockade, with Qatars largely prohibited from entering

the United Arab Emirates after Doha was accused of supporting terrorism in June 2017.

The win also confirmed Saudi Arabia's progression from Group E, with both teams on six points after two games. AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

ASIAN CUP
UAE v Thailand (Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208), India v Bahrain (Ch115 & Ch209) – 11.50pm

Heads, Toffees win



Kurt Zouma heading past Bournemouth goalkeeper Asmir Begovic for the opener as the Toffees secured a 2-0 win yesterday to move up to 10th in the Premier League. The defender, who is on loan from Chelsea, scored his first goal for the club, with substitute Dominic Calvert-Lewin netting the second in added time. PHOTO: REUTERS

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS				
Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Tue, 15 Jan 2019				
Asian Cup	UAE	Thailand	12.00am	LW*
Asian Cup	India	Bahrain	12.00am	LW*
Italian Cup	Cagliari	Atalanta	12.30am	LW*
English Premier	Manchester City	Wolverhampton	4.00am	LW*
Spanish League	Sociedad	Espanyol	4.00am	LW*

LW* : Telecast available at Livewire(Marina Bay Sands) only
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LOTTERY

TOTO Mon, 14 Jan 2019, 6.30pm Draw No. 3440/2019

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Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994

No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or claim any prize.

LW: Livewire (MBS) & Livewire (RWS) (21 years and above)

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TRICKY TIE, BUT CITY CAN FEND OFF WOLVES

Champions show they have put last month's uncharacteristic bad run behind them

LONDON • Pep Guardiola's revitalised Manchester City face a potentially tricky challenge at home to Wolves today (tomorrow morning Singapore time) as they attempt to cut the deficit to Premier League leaders Liverpool to four points.

However, City have shown enough just two weeks into the new year to suggest that their uncharacteristic collapse in form last month is firmly behind them.

The English champions' slump was triggered after Chelsea ended their unbeaten streak in the league and they subsequently lost successive league games, against relatively modest opposition in both Crystal Palace and Leicester.

But a victory over the Reds to kick off the second half of the term has completely rejuvenated the mood at the Etihad Stadium.

Since then, two Cup routs in the space of four days – albeit against lower league clubs Rotherham and Burton – have indicated the return of the clinical edge that characterised their play during last season's record-breaking campaign.

It was a mood reflected by Kevin de Bruyne, who has been injured for most of the first half of their campaign, against Rotherham when he showed visible dissatisfaction at being brought off after an hour, even though City were already leading by five goals.

While media reports have hinted at his anger, with de Bruyne reportedly refusing to return to the bench to watch the remainder of their FA

Cup third-round 7-0 win, instead opting to head straight down the tunnel, Guardiola refused to address the speculation, claiming he "did not speak with him" over the Belgian forward's reaction.

Despite his petulance, de Bruyne remains in line to start just his second league game of the term when City take on Wolves.

Sergio Aguero and captain Vincent Kompany, who have not played since the Liverpool match, look set to return to the first XI, and Guardiola confirmed his team had a clean bill of health as "the rest (except for Benjamin Mendy) are fit".

The Spaniard also felt City could maintain their chase for honours on four fronts even though they are unlikely to reinforce by dipping into the January transfer market.

He said: "Sometimes, we have done it but, normally, when you want to buy one player, it is for the next five or six years and, normally, it doesn't happen in this window."

Despite declaring his happiness with his players, he warned that Wolves would be no pushovers and they had no margin for error.

Recalling how Nuno Espirito Santo's men held City to a credible 1-1 league draw earlier in the season at Molineux, he added: "They are strong physically, (at) counter-attack, set-pieces. They defend well, deep, they control many



areas (through Joao) Moutinho.

"(Ruben) Neves, he can shoot from a long way. They are newly promoted and doing incredibly well." AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

MANCHESTER CITY V WOLVES
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227,
tomorrow, 4am

Pep Guardiola has confirmed that his Manchester City players, including Raheem Sterling (left) and Fabian Delph, have a clean bill of health. PHOTO: REUTERS

Klopp praises 'most mature' Reds display

LONDON • This was far from the vintage "opera of football" Jurgen Klopp is known for producing but his side still received a rousing reception from the away fans following their "really nice song" which saw them move seven points clear at the top of the Premier League, fuelling hopes they can finally end their 29-year wait for a league title.

After suffering their first loss in the league to champions Manchester City followed by an FA Cup third-round exit at the hands of Wolves, it was vital for Liverpool to stop the blip from turning into a rut at the Amex Stadium on Saturday.

While Klopp's men could not replicate the "Harlem Globetrotters" on their travels, the German was delighted with their "most mature performance of the season" as Liverpool emerged 1-0 victors at Brighton in a tightly contested game that had precious few chances.

Speaking after Mohamed Salah's second-half penalty – his 17th goal of the season – gave Liverpool the three points, the Reds manager added: "We have to deliver results. You have to work hard if you want to be successful and we were ready for it."

"On the good days, everybody can win. On average days, not a lot of teams can win football games and, on a bad day, only a few can win. Today was not a bad day, but it was a difficult day because Brighton are doing really well."

Klopp also insisted the gap, which City can close to four points with victory over Wolves today, "means nothing as tomorrow and Monday night could be different, and we can only concentrate on ourselves".

But he knows his watertight defence, which recorded their 13th clean sheet in 22 league games this season, provides the perfect base to build on. Only Chelsea (2004-05 season) have let in fewer goals after 22 matches in an English top-flight term.

The predatory instincts of Salah, who moved level with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Harry Kane as the league's top scorer on 14 goals, should also ensure they will be in the title mix come May.

Brighton's game plan of sitting deep meant the visitors dominated possession without any cutting edge before Pascal Gross hauled down Salah in the box and undid Chris Hughton's preparations.

The Seagulls boss, who had no complaints over the spot-kick award, lamented: "I feel for Pascal because Mo Salah is probably the most dangerous player once he gets in those positions one on one." AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Spanish forward Pedro in good spirits after scoring Chelsea's opening goal against Newcastle, as Willian joins in the celebrations. The Brazilian netted the winner in the second half. PHOTO: REUTERS



OUT OF MY HANDS

The club knows very well my opinion, I need the player there (but) it depends on the club decision.

“

MAURIZIO SARRI Chelsea manager, who has urged the Premier League club to beef up their midfield.

Midfielder wanted to keep up Blues' push

LONDON • With a six-point gap separating fourth-placed Chelsea and nearest challengers Arsenal, Maurizio Sarri has urged the club's hierarchy to reinforce their midfield in the January transfer window to consolidate their top-four place.

After breezing past Newcastle 2-1 in the English Premier League on Saturday, the Chelsea manager feels signings would keep up their push for the last automatic Champions League spot.

Despite having a star-studded squad, the Blues still lack depth in key positions with Sarri admitting

he "needs an option for Jorginho". He told reporters after the victory at Stamford Bridge: "As you have seen, today, Jorginho was in trouble (after collecting a yellow card) and on the bench, there wasn't a player for that position so I need a player."

"The club knows very well my opinion, I need the player there (but) it depends on the club decision."

The Italian reiterated his stance that Willian, who netted the 57th-minute winner against Rafael Benitez's men and has been linked with a big-money move to Barcelona,

was going nowhere as he "is a fundamental player".

The Brazil forward took turns with Pedro, who opened the scoring for the home side in the ninth minute, to torment the Magpies, whose 40th-minute equaliser came from Ciaran Clark.

Despite the ongoing speculation, Willian, who has just 18 months left on his contract, remains a "very important player" with the ability to take the scoring load off top scorer Eden Hazard, given the woeful form of their main strikers Olivier Giroud and Alvaro Morata.

While Sarri claimed post-game "he did not know anything" about a possible extension to his deal, Willian, who scored just his fifth goal of the season and first in the league since October, insisted that he was paying no heed to the rumours, telling BT Sport his "future was here at Chelsea".

In Italy, Gennaro Gattuso, Sarri's counterpart at AC Milan, similarly had to fend off the same line of questioning over Gonzalo Higuain, whom Chelsea are reportedly targeting to solve their issues up front. The Argentina striker joined Mi-

lan on a season-long loan from Juventus in July with an option to make the deal permanent, but he has struggled to settle at the San Siro, scoring just eight goals in all competitions this term.

After again drawing a blank in their 2-0 Italian Cup win over Sampdoria on Saturday, Gattuso said the club were "holding on tightly to him" for now before conceding that he "did not know what will happen" as "when a player makes up his mind (to leave), it becomes hard to convince them otherwise". AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

SLINGERS BEATEN BY THE BUZZER

Umpires rule time expired when Fields shot, as Mono Vampire clock first win on the road

David Lee

The crowd at the OCBC Arena erupted as Singapore Slingers centre John Fields looked to have made the game-tying basket right at the final buzzer of the Asean Basketball League game against Mono Vampire yesterday.

But, to the disappointment of the home bench and fans, the umpires ruled that he had executed his shot after the clock ran out.

And it was the visitors who celebrated their first away win in the 81-79 victory, even though they remained ninth in the 10-team ABL with a 2-8 win-loss record.

The hosts had only themselves to blame after they let slip seven-point leads on a few occasions, including a 67-60 advantage at the start of the fourth quarter.

Despite their opponents' late surge to go 72-71 up midway through the final period, the Slingers must have fancied their chances after Mono Vampire's influential centre Malcolm White fouled out with 23 points and seven rebounds with more than four minutes to play.

But Neo Beng Siang's men just could not capitalise on the advantage, missing numerous free throws, jumpers and lay-ups, as last season's finalists Mono Vampire played impressive defence to keep the Slingers at bay.

Frustrated by his team's propen-



sity to make life difficult for themselves as they dropped to fifth with a 7-5 win-loss record, Neo told the Straits Times: "The last shot was 50-50 and a tough call but we shouldn't have been in that position. We are supposed to be one of the best defensive teams but we did not look like that today."

"We lacked communication in defence and movement in offence. We have to train harder and get back to basics, which is playing good defence."

After White fouled out, it was left to Michael Singletary to lead the scoring for Mono, and he obliged with 23 points and 14 rebounds, as Fields' game-high 27 points were not enough to turn the tide while the Slingers were out-rebounded 50-42.

White told ST he was worried his team would miss his presence after he had to leave the court, but added: "Defensively, we played our best game of the season against one of the best teams in the league."

"We made stops when we needed to, and kept fighting until the end. That last stop to prevent Xavier (Alexander) from making his lay-up before John Fields' basket after the buzzer was huge. Hopefully we can kick-start our season from here and make the last-eight play-offs."

The Slingers' next match is away at CLS Knights, Indonesia on Sunday, when they will face their former point guard Wong Wei Long.

davidlee@sph.com.sg

A game-high 27 points by John Fields could not help the Singapore Slingers, who were out-rebounded 50-42 and were beaten 81-79 at home by Mono Vampire yesterday. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

1

Mono Vampire's win over the Singapore Slingers at the OCBC Arena is their first road victory this season.



Blake Griffin led the Detroit Pistons to a 109-104 victory against the Los Angeles Clippers, who traded him abruptly a year ago. PHOTO: REUTERS

Griffin torches ex-team Clippers with 44 pts

LOS ANGELES • In a long-anticipated revenge game against his former team, Blake Griffin punished the Los Angeles Clippers in every conceivable manner on Saturday.

Draining three-pointers, throwing down hammer dunks, hitting the deck for loose balls and inviting chippy altercations, the Clippers could not contain him as they slumped to a 109-104 National Basketball Association loss to the visiting Detroit Pistons.

But Griffin swore the only message he sent came during the game,

and not beforehand.

The five-time All-Star, who told reporters he has had no contact with the Clippers' front office since they abruptly traded him a year ago, had a game-high 44 points after shooting 13-of-23 from the field and drilling five beyond the arc.

Afterwards, he was adamant that a viral video, which appeared to show him ignoring an attempted handshake from Clippers owner Steve Ballmer, was not an intentional snubbing of his former boss. "For nine years now, as soon as

I'm done with my pre-game shooting, I make sure there's a path and I take off running to the locker room.

"I don't stop running. A lot of you have seen me do that before. I don't change that for anybody. To tweet out something like that, I thought was kind of b*****".

"That's what it was. Plain and simple. It wasn't anything planned. Every single game I've done this for how long."

Even so, his ongoing frustration at being blindsided by the blockbuster trade – after spending his

first eight seasons in the league with the Clippers – was evident.

Asked whether he would shake hands with Ballmer if the opportunity presented itself again, he curtly said: "I'm honestly not here to answer hypothetical questions."

The Clippers did their part to be nice, welcoming back Griffin with an extended tribute video. The Staples Centre crowd also greeted him with a standing ovation and his highlight plays drew scattered cheers all night.

Nevertheless, the home team,

who fell to 24-18, were on the wrong end of the full Griffin experience all afternoon as the forward became the first Pistons player since Jerry Stackhouse in 2001 to tally multiple 40-point games in the same season.

Celebratory whoops could be heard from inside the Pistons' locker room following their victory and team coach Dwane Casey revealed that "it meant a lot to Blake".

He added: "The most important thing was his teammates were excited for him." WASHINGTON POST

'Miracle' Mikuru claims world title

LONDON • Japanese qualifier Mikuru Suzuki became the first Asian player to win a world darts championship title on Saturday with victory in the women's BDO final at the Lakeside Country Club.

The 36-year-old debutante completed a stunning success with a comprehensive 3-0 win over English world No. 1 Lorraine Winstanley.

Suzuki, whose husband flew in overnight to watch her, dropped only two legs in the final as she clinched the trophy and the £12,000 (\$20,000) top prize without losing a single set in her four matches.

"It was my best darts in this tournament, and probably my best this year too," Suzuki, dubbed "The Miracle", said. "I'm obviously so happy. Lorraine is a fantastic player so I just wanted to play my best game and thankfully, I did."

Winstanley, who was taking part in her first world final, "was gutted"



with the loss but vowed "to be back, (having) made the final".

Having caused a massive shock by knocking out four-time champion Lisa Ashton in the first round, Suzuki capped a memorable fort-

night with a record three-dart average for a women's final of 90.12.

Ashton had held the previous mark for a year.

The Japanese player's success could have been even sweeter after

flirting with what would have been the first televised women's nine-darter following back-to-back 180s at the beginning of the second set.

However, Suzuki's seventh dart just missed the red bit.

She becomes only the fifth winner of the BDO women's world championship since the inaugural edition in 2001 and is also the first non-European to win the title.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

FOOTBALL
AFC Asian Cup Group A: UAE v Thailand (Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208), India v Bahrain (Ch115 & Ch209) – 11.50pm.

English Premier League
Manchester City v Wolves (Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, tomorrow, 4am).

Spanish LaLiga Sociedad v Espanyol (StarHub Ch213, tomorrow, 3.55am).

TENNIS

Australian Open Day 1 (Singtel TV Ch114/115 & StarHub Ch208/209, 8am & 4pm).

TOMORROW

FOOTBALL

AFC Asian Cup Group B: Australia v Syria (Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209), Palestine v Jordan (Ch116 & Ch210) – 9.20pm.

English FA Cup 3rd-round replay: Blackburn v Newcastle (Singtel TV Ch111, Wednesday, 3.40am).

TENNIS

Australian Open Day 2 (Singtel TV Ch114/Ch115 & StarHub Ch208/209, 8am & 4pm).

For latest updates, go to singteltv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

SPORT

SportsWorld

Teen paddler Koen wins three golds

Teenage Singapore paddler Koen Pang clinched a hat-trick of titles at the National Table Tennis Grand Finale, which ended yesterday.

The 16-year-old beat Josh Chua 4-0 in the men's singles and partnered Ethan Poh and Wong Xinru respectively to win the men's doubles 3-1 and mixed doubles 3-2.

Yu Mengyu beat Lin Ye 4-0 in the women's singles in a match-up of national players, while teenagers Zhou Jingyi and Ser Lingqian beat Wong and Goi Ruixuan 3-0 in the women's doubles.

Griezmann ensures Atletico keep pace

MADRID • Antoine Griezmann proved to be Atletico Madrid's decisive figure yet again, as the France forward struck the only goal in a 1-0 win at home to Levante which kept Diego Simeone's side in touch with LaLiga leaders Barcelona.

Griezmann's penalty was awarded after Levante midfielder Nikola Vukcevic was penalised for handball in the area. Yesterday's victory took second-placed Atletico to 38 points after 19 games. REUTERS

Kuchar continues good play in Hawaii

HONOLULU • Matt Kuchar went bogey-free again to earn a two-stroke lead over Andrew Putnam after the third round at the Sony Open in Hawaii on Saturday.

An inability to birdie the par-five 18th, where he hit a poor third shot, was the only minor complaint he had after a four-under 66 at Waialae Country Club.

He recorded an 18-under 192 total, while Putnam drained a birdie at the last for a 67 to go 16 under. REUTERS

IPC to seek solution for Israeli swimmers

KUALA LUMPUR • The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) expressed its disappointment on Saturday, after Malaysia said it would not allow Israeli swimmers to attend a competition in the country that will serve as a qualifying event for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics.

However, the IPC said in a statement that it would aim to "find a solution" to the issue, as entering Malaysia on an Israeli passport remains prohibited. AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

PLAYER UNREST COULD COST ATP CHIEF

Djokovic rebuts talk of vote to oust Kermode, Federer says he'll seek input from other stars

MELBOURNE • Novak Djokovic insisted yesterday that no decision had been taken about ousting ATP Tour chief Chris Kermode after reports of a player revolt against the way the sport was being run.

The Daily Telegraph had reported a move was under way to topple the Briton, citing a strongly-worded e-mail sent by ATP player council member Vasek Pospisil to players ranked between 50th and 100th.

It reportedly called for the work-force to "start acting and running like a business not like a bunch of scared kids... we need a CEO that first and foremost represents our interests". The e-mail added that "the governance structure of the ATP favours the interests of the

tournaments and its (their) owners... It's time for a change and it can be achieved by staying unified and demanding what we deserve for our hard work".

The daily said the ATP board – consisting of three tournament representatives and three player representatives – would vote on a possible renewal of Kermode's contract this month.

He needs two of the three board members from each side of the ATP to support him.

The ATP players' council, headed by Djokovic, met in Melbourne on Saturday and reportedly voted 5-4 against Kermode continuing in the role he has held for five years.

Asked for clarity in a press conference yesterday, the top-ranked

Serb said: "I don't know where you got that information, a 5-4."

"That information is completely confidential, so I can't speak about anything that we spoke about in that room."

The 14-time Grand Slam winner added: "The decision hasn't been made on the president. He's still president. He'll remain president till the end of his term (this year)."

"Whether there's a renewal or not, it's going to be decided in the next period."

When asked for his reaction on Kermode's position, world No. 3 Roger Federer claimed he was not on top of what was going on but would speak to his peers about it.

He said: "We've had a good five, six years now under Chris' leadership. Obviously, it's an important role. We need to look at it very thoroughly."

"I need to speak with Novak, Rafa (Nadal), and Andy (Murray) a little

bit to get their take on it all."

Darren Cahill, the former coach of women's world No. 1 Simona Halep tweeted that he "would be stunned if Kermode was removed", before listing the Briton's accomplishments including "big increases in prize money... new progressive rules... facility upgrades".

One man who has been touted as a potential replacement for Kermode is Tennis Australia and Australian Open boss Craig Tiley.

Adding to the ATP board woes was member Justin Gimelstob pleading not guilty last month to a felony battery charge in a Los Angeles court.

The retired two-time Grand Slam mixed doubles champion has been accused of attacking former friend Randall Kaplan, although Djokovic said the players' council was "comfortable" with Gimelstob remaining in his position unless "proven guilty". AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE



Defending champion Roger Federer is aware of the pecking order in Melbourne, with top-ranked Novak Djokovic the clear favourite in his eyes. PHOTO: REUTERS

SMBC Singapore Open clinic

Some of the world's best golfers will be in town for the Jan 17-20 SMBC Singapore Open. The Straits Times, in partnership with 100Plus, is offering ST readers an opportunity to learn from a pro in a golf clinic. Answer the following question correctly to earn a chance at winning a pair of passes (five pairs are available).

Date: Friday, Jan 18
Time: 2.30-3.30pm

Q: Who is the SMBC Singapore Open 2019 defending champion?

A: E-mail your answers (subject header: SMBC Singapore Open clinic), together with your name, IC and contact number to yufan.ong@imsg.sg by 5pm, Monday, Jan 14

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Passes are not exchangeable.
- By entering this contest, you agree to share data (including personal data) with organisers solely for the purposes of this contest.
- The organisers' decision is final.
- Employees of 100Plus, IMSG and Singapore Press Holdings are not eligible to enter this contest.
- Passes to the tournament are valid only for admission to the Serapong Course at the Sentosa Golf Club and such other designated area(s) (the "Venue") on the date(s) as shown. The Sentosa Island admission fee and vehicle fee shall still apply. Passes must be produced at appropriate entry points and/or on demand by any authorised official. Pass holders shall display their passes at all times whilst they are at the venue.
- All passes are personal to the holders and are strictly non-transferable.



Australian Open 2019

Federer feels he's 'in a great position'

MELBOURNE • Amelie Mauresmo won her two Grand Slam singles titles at the Australian Open and Wimbledon in 2006 and retired three years later.

She would not have imagined then that Roger Federer, the man who won the same two Grand Slam singles titles that year, would still be among tennis' elite more than a decade later.

"I don't know how he does it," the Frenchwoman said. "What it puts on your body is huge. The training, the matches, the travel, the jet lag – anything."

While Mauresmo will be at the first Major of the year as the coach of compatriot Lucas Pouille, Federer's bid for a 21st Grand Slam starts today against Uzbekistan's Denis Istomin.

"Winning back-to-back Australian Opens like this, in my mid-30s, it's one of my favourite things I will look back on in my career," the two-time defending

champion said. "I didn't think it was going to happen."

The 37-year-old acknowledges his age readily, quipping at the Hopman Cup recently that his then opponent, 20-year-old Stefanos Tsitsipas, "could be my son".

Despite marvelling at his own ability to run up the score in the record books – 99 titles and counting – at an age when many would count him out, Federer seemed to trail off after an auspicious start to last season, when he won his first 17 matches.

After winning the Rotterdam Open in February and briefly reclaiming the No.1 ranking, the Swiss went without another tournament championship until October.

However, he played down the doomsday talk that followed his stagnation in the second half of last year ahead of his first-round match.

"I wasn't too disappointed," he insisted. "I was more surprised to

hear that there was sort of concern, or people were saying, 'What a bad second half to the year.' I'm happy where I am right now. I'm in a great position."

Promising to do better this year, he also revealed his aim to "really play well when it really comes down to the crunch".

Yet Federer is aware of where he stands in the pecking order at Melbourne Park, with top-ranked Novak Djokovic the clear favourite in his eyes.

The Serb, a six-time champion in Melbourne, has won the past two Slams, but Federer remains his chief threat.

He said: "We know who the usual (contenders) are and I'm part of that bunch. I'm playing good tennis. I'm confident that it needs a good performance by my opponent probably to beat me (here)."

The longevity of that oligarchy, which also includes world No. 2 Rafael Nadal, has blocked several

younger players from breaking through on tennis' biggest stages.

No player currently younger than 30 has won even a set in a Grand Slam final although expectations are high that ATP Finals champion Alexander Zverev can build on his impressive victory in November.

Although the German is regarded as the most capable of the next generation to break the Slam cartel of the old guard, he has never gotten beyond the third round in Melbourne and has reached the last eight of a Major only once.

But, having won in London, the fourth-ranked 21-year-old, who will play Slovene Aljaz Bedene tomorrow, believes he has now "kind of figured out I have to have the same mentality when I play at Slams". AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE, NYTIMES, REUTERS

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

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- Amy Atherton

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How much screen time should kids get?

Health bodies in different countries have different guidelines while medical experts say the lack of evidence does not mean that excessive screen time is not harmful

PHOTO: ISTOCK



Joyce Teo

Even though most parents believe it is unhealthy for children to be glued to a screen, they often leave the kids in front of the television or with an iPad or phone in return for some peace and quiet.

But parents need not feel too guilty - new guidance on children's screen time from Britain suggests that the evidence of harm from screen time is often overstated.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) said earlier this month that it would not recommend any age-appropriate time limits because there is not enough evidence that screen time harms a child's health at any age.

Instead, it recommends that families negotiate screen time limits with their children based on their needs. Parents should decide how much is enough.

However, the college did recommend that children refrain from using digital devices in the hour before bedtime because of evidence that they can harm sleep.

The guidelines can seem conservative because many parents often limit their children's screen time.

In the United States, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends age-appropriate time limits.

An RCPCH spokesman said it could not find consistent evidence for any specific health or well-being benefits of screen time.

"Although there are negative associations between screen time and poor mental health, sleep and fitness, we cannot be sure that these links are causal, or if other factors are causing both negative health outcomes and higher screen time," he said.

BUT IT CAN BE PROBLEMATIC

Medical experts, however, warned that the lack of solid evidence does not mean that excessive screen time is not harmful.

Problems arise when screen time displaces physical activity and face-to-face social interaction and affects sleep and school performance.

"There's still some controversy, but the overall consensus is that excessive screen time is not recommended, especially for young children," said Dr Ong Say How, a senior consultant and chief of the department of developmental psychiatry at the Institute of Mental Health.

He added: "Some kids do not shower or eat late into the night despite pleas from their parents. They also sacrifice their sleep and we know that Singapore kids are sleep-deprived."

In recent years, the scientific literature supporting the connection between tech use and symptoms has been growing, said Dr Gary Small, a psychiatry professor and director of the University of California, Los Angeles' Longevity Centre.

"Our group did a study showing that pre-teens who went for five days without television, computers or smart phones had significant improvements in emotional and social intelligence," he said.

Studies have also linked excessive screen time to other negative effects such as poorer memory.

"The main fear with the increase-

ing use of digital devices is that it will compromise time spent on physical or outdoor activities, sleep and human interaction with other children or adults in a typical 24-hour period," said Dr Wendy Liew, a paediatrician, with a special interest in neurology, at SBCC Baby & Child Clinic.

BE MINDFUL OF DIGITAL MEDIA USE

Dr Yang Linqi, a paediatrician at Thomson Medical Centre, said the new British guidelines builds on the current thinking that screen time should be controlled, but counters that not all screen time is bad.

She said the guidelines are catered towards older children and young persons and are not relevant to younger infants and toddlers.

Dr Ong said, as a guide, a child aged below 18 months should not be exposed to screen time as he is still learning basic skills like toileting and eating.

Older children can have limited screen time, though screen time should not prevent a child from exploring his environment and getting new experiences, he said.

"Children are also developing their fine motor and language skills, and screen time is not going to help in those areas," he added.

"Face-to-face interaction is still the preferred way of social engagement. It is when you activate more of your learning as you use more skill sets - motor, physical, social skills," said Dr Ong.

Dr Small said moderation is key.

"One important principle to keep in mind is that when we spend a lot of time on a particular mental task, the neural circuits controlling that task strengthen," he said.

"However, when we spend too much time on a particular task such

as video gaming, it is likely that we neglect other mental tasks like conversations and physical exercise, and the neural circuits controlling those tasks weaken."

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Parents need to supervise their children when it comes to screen time.

"The brain of a child is like a sponge. A young and immature child may not be able to discern what is real and what is not, what is right and what is not right," said Dr Ong.

Limits should be enforced from a young age, so that the child knows he does not have free access to digital media. "You can't take for granted that he will know when to stop," said Dr Ong.

Problems arise when screen time displaces physical activity and face-to-face social interaction and affects sleep and school performance.

Dr Lim Boon Leng, a psychiatrist at Gleneagles Hospital, said a common mistake parents make is in allowing very young children free rein over the usage when they are in pre-school and limiting them once there is academic stress.

"Having control over screen time from day one is important in getting the child to accept that he or she needs guidance over it."

Also, parents should teach their children how to protect themselves online, such as not disclosing personal data, said Dr Ong.

"Parents can engage with their child on social media and, in the process, interact and guide them online," he said.

"Parents should be better informed about digital media. Very often, they are clueless about digital media and hence the child gets a free hand in how to do it, and that's when it can get out of control."

Dr Liew said what is most important is how parents are going to guide their children in the use of digital media.

"For younger children, deciding on the content is important. Sitting with the children and watching together can help them understand what they are seeing," she said.

"Placing consistent limits on time spent and ensuring that this does not impact outdoor activities, sleep and so on is important, and also ensuring human interaction and media-free times such as during meal times."

HOW BAD CAN THE HARM BE?

The overuse of digital devices can lead to behavioural addiction, neglect of school, academic failures and severe family conflicts. It has also been associated with depression, said Dr Lim.

The jury is still out on whether excessive screen time can result in anxiety, depression and other negative psychological effects, considering digital media has not been around for very long, said Dr Ong.

So far, there is "just some hint of association" between excessive screen time and these effects.

Children who are more vulnerable to these effects, such as those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), should be more careful about such use, said Dr Ong.

ADHD is a mental disorder that involves inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

"There's some concern that excessive gaming can lead to ADHD. For example, if the child has a short attention span, excessive gaming does increase the risks of him developing ADHD," said Dr Ong.

"One thing I would emphasise is that parents need to assess how much screen time impacts their child's behaviour," said Dr Small.

"Some kids are very sensitive while others are not. For a sensitive child, greater monitoring would be needed," he said.

"Also, if a child is doing well in school, spends time offline and has no symptoms, then restriction may not be as important."

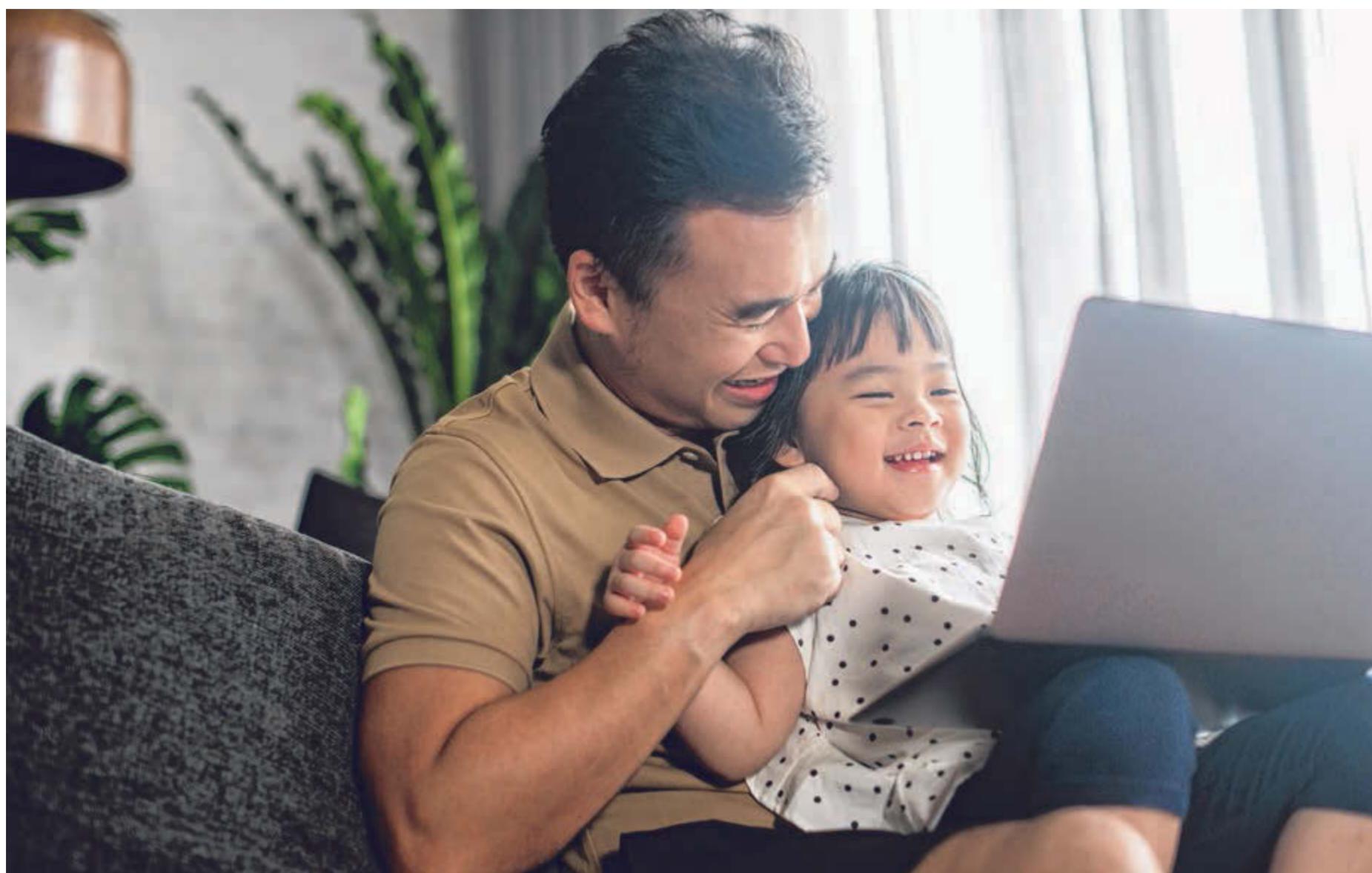
Indeed, every child may be impacted by screen time differently.

Said Dr Lim: "While screen time use can be a problem, do not just see it as an enemy but that as parents, we can also utilise it as an incentive and a tool which the family can enjoy together."

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MORE STORIES on D2

From D1



Pros and cons of video games

Joyce Teo

Playing video games like Warcraft can boost some aspects of cognitive function, such as reaction time, complex reasoning and visual memory, said Dr Gary Small, a psychiatry professor in the United States and director of the University of California, Los Angeles' Longevity Centre.

"In moderation, video games can be fun and represent another form of social interaction."

It is only when gaming becomes excessive that it may have a negative impact on face-to-face communication skills or emotional and so-

cial intelligence; or lead to less time spent on physical exercise, he said.

"We have shown that simply searching online will alter neural networks after just one week, one hour a day," said Dr Small.

"All these activities have brain and cognitive effects. The question is whether the effects will be positive or negative, and that depends on the extent of use and the nature of the mental activities involved in the use."

What parents should take note of is the suitability of the games for their child,

Dr Ong Say How, a senior consultant and chief of the department of developmental psychiatry at the In-

stitute of Mental Health, said children and young adults are more vulnerable to media influence, unlike adults who are more mature cognitively and have a stronger sense of morals.

"For a child or a young teenager, if he keeps watching violent or sexual scenes, he becomes sensitised to them and may reenact them in the real world," he said.

"People think that teenagers are mature, but they are not. Studies have shown that your brain is fully mature only in your mid-20s."

Online games may help develop certain skills. "You have better hand-eye coordination and are probably more agile with your fin-

gers, but is there a lot more to it?" said Dr Ong.

In theory, video games can be dispensed with, but many people enjoy them too much, said Dr Small.

The key is to balance screen time with activities away from the screen, such as physical exercise, social interactions and other experiences that support brain health, he said.

A child needs to have recreational activities every day and these should not be restricted to Internet games, said Dr Ong.

Screen time has to be balanced with other forms of social and physical activities, so as to allow the child to learn new skills that the computer cannot teach, he said.

Parents of children aged 18 to 24 months who want to introduce digital media should choose high-quality programming and watch it with their children to help them understand what they are seeing.

PHOTO: ISTOCK

Screen time guidelines

Key recommendations on screen time from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP):

- For children younger than 18 months, avoid the use of screen media other than video-chatting.
- Parents of children aged 18 to 24 months who want to introduce digital media should choose high-quality programming and watch it with their children to help them understand what they are seeing.
- For those aged two to five, limit screen use to one hour a day of high-quality programmes. Parents should watch the programmes with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.
- For children aged six and older, place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviours essential to health.
- Designate media-free times together, such as dinner or driving, as well as media-free locations at home, such as bedrooms.
- Have ongoing communication about online citizenship and safety, including treating others with respect online and offline.
- The AAP has an interactive, online tool for families to create a personalised family media-use plan.

Key recommendations on screen time from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health:

- Families should negotiate screen time limits with their children based on the needs of each child, the ways in which screens are used and the degree to which use of screens appears to displace (or not) physical and social activities and sleep.
- Screens should be avoided for an hour before the planned bedtime.

As a guide to examine their screen time, families can ask these four key questions:

1. Is screen time in your household controlled?
2. Does screen use interfere with what your family wants to do?
3. Does screen use interfere with sleep?
4. Are you able to control snacking during screen time?

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Helping dementia patients with everyday activities

NEW YORK • He was a retired factory worker, living with his wife outside a small town in Britain.

Once outgoing and sociable, he had been jolted by a diagnosis of early dementia.

A few months later, at 70, he would not leave the house alone, fearful that if he needed help, he could not manage to use a cellphone to call his wife. He avoided household chores he had previously undertaken.

When his wife tried to show him how to use the washer, he could not remember her instructions.

"He'd lost a lot of confidence," said Ms Linda Clare, a clinical psychologist at the University of Exeter. "He was actually capable, but he was frightened of making a mistake, getting it wrong."

She directed a recent trial of cognitive rehabilitation in England and Wales in which the patient was enrolled. Cognitive rehabilitation, which Ms Clare has been researching for 20 years, evolved from methods used to help people with brain injuries.

The practice brings occupational and other therapists into the homes of dementia patients to learn which everyday activities they are struggling with and which abilities they want to preserve or improve on.

In weekly sessions over several months, the therapists devise strategies that can help, at least in the early

and moderate stages of the disease. The therapists show patients how to compensate for memory problems and practise new techniques.

Cognitive rehabilitation has its limitations. "We never suggest this can reverse the effects of dementia," Ms Clare said.

But she and other European researchers have demonstrated that people with dementia can significantly improve their ability to do the tasks they have opted to tackle.

Those improvements persist over months, perhaps up to a year, even as participants' cognition declines in other ways.

This approach may represent the future for the growing number of older adults around the world with dementia.

Trials of drugs to prevent or treat dementia have failed repeatedly.

Even if some future treatment demonstrated effectiveness, millions of people and their stressed family caregivers need help now.

"We can't wait another 20 years for some magic pill," said Ms Laura Gitlin, dean of the College of Nursing and Health Professions at Drexel University.

She has developed the Tailored Activity Programme, somewhat similar to cognitive rehabilitation, which also brings occupational therapists into people's homes.

"We're trying to lay the scientific basis for non-pharmacological approaches," Ms Gitlin said.

"These studies signal that they can have powerful effects on people's lives."

In Britain, a government-supported trial involving 475 people with early-stage dementia found that after cognitive rehabilitation, most participants attained their goals, while those in a control group did not, and they maintained improvement at three and nine months.

One could argue that even when it works, cognitive rehabilitation has only a modest impact. Compared with the devastation dementia eventually inflicts - the years-long toll on family caregivers, the healthcare costs - how much of a triumph is it to be able to use a TV remote for a few additional months or a year? To make a cup of tea or walk the dog?

But there is so little good news for people with dementia. They and their families might welcome reports of a rehabilitative approach that could reduce frustrations and make life easier, even for a limited time.

"It's so sensible," said Mr Steven Zarit, a long-time researcher of dementia and caregiving at Pennsylvania State University.

"Instead of trying to delay changes in cognition, it tries to delay changes in function."

"People can do more for themselves and have a better life because of it." NYTIMES

Treat teen acne early

Delaying care may cause distress and scarring that could require cosmetic surgery, say experts

NEW YORK • Acne appeared sporadically at first when Sophia Steinberg was in eighth grade, but, in two years, her face, chest and back were covered with lesions of cystic acne.

"I was very self-conscious, deeply insecure and anxious," the Brooklyn high school student said.

"I would wake up ashamed for my face. I had to use so much make-up and wear concealing clothing.

"I avoided doing presentations in front of the class."

The teenage years are challenging for many youngsters, even under the best of circumstances. But if the face they present to the world is marred by acne, the ordinary emotional and social stresses of adolescence can be that much more difficult to weather.

As Dr Andrea Zaenglein, professor of dermatology and paediatrics at Pennsylvania State University, reported in The New England Journal



Of Medicine, "the psychological effects of acne can be profound and sufferers are at risk for substantial, negative effects on quality of life".

"Acne affects how teenagers feel about themselves. Acne is very visible – the face is the first thing people see. Yet, kids don't always tell their parents how much acne is impacting them."

Dr Robert Dellavalle, professor of dermatology at the University of Colorado in Denver, said: "It's not a

killer, but it can scar people literally and psychologically."

Complicating matters are many misunderstandings about what causes acne and a general lack of knowledge about how well modern treatments can control it.

As many as 85 per cent of teens are affected to some degree.

Though most cases are mild and respond to simple over-the-counter remedies, others are more severe, long-lasting and in need of

proper care is often delayed when people assume that their acne will soon get better, but it can take many years to run its course, says dermatology professor Andrea Zaenglein.

PHOTO: ST FILE

professional care. Too often, that care is delayed, resulting in persistent emotional and social distress and permanent scarring that may warrant cosmetic surgery.

Proper care is often delayed when people assume that things will soon get better. But Prof Zaenglein said: "Acne can take many years to run its course. And women can be plagued by it well into adulthood."

For still unknown reasons, dermatologists are seeing an increase in persistent acne in adult women, said Prof Dellavalle.

Contrary to common belief, acne does not result from surface dirt or infrequent skin cleansing.

In fact, irritation of the skin from too frequent washing can promote acne. Prof Dellavalle recommends gentle skincare with a product such as Cetaphil rather than soap.

Washing should be limited to twice a day, Prof Zaenglein added.

The influence of diet is largely theoretical and hard to test.

Global studies suggest that a high-glycaemic diet – one rich in refined carbohydrates and sugars – can promote acne. A low-glycaemic diet rich in whole grains and legumes seems to improve acne in teens and is "good medical advice for everyone", Prof Dellavalle said.

Dairy products may aggravate acne in some people, so teens who are big milk drinkers might want to try cutting back to see if their acne improves.

Likewise, heavy consumers of

meat and poultry, rich in the amino acid leucine, may be more likely to develop acne through a complex chain reaction that stimulates the skin's oil glands.

But the influence on acne of other dietary items such as chocolate and fried foods is more myth than fact.

Dr Steven Feldman, professor of dermatology at the Wake Forest School of Medicine in North Carolina, said that "within reason, diet doesn't have a big effect on acne".

He suspects that most mistaken beliefs about diet stem from the fact that "when adolescent hormones kick in, teens get very hungry and coincidentally also get acne".

More important than restricting diet is getting the right treatment.

Most mild cases respond well to over-the-counter remedies such as benzoyl peroxide, which kills acne-fostering bacteria.

Washing should be limited to twice a day, Prof Zaenglein added.

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Likewise, heavy consumers of

The brand has grown by pushing into fast-food chains like Wendy's, Subway and McDonald's.

"It's very easy to say kids should drink more water," said Honest co-founder Seth Goldman. "But kids need some flavour."

Still, it can be hard to count on kids for brand loyalty.

Mr Mike Weinstein, former chief executive of Snapple Beverage Group who now runs his own consulting firm, fields calls all the time from entrepreneurial mums who want to get into the business.

His advice: "Tell them to save their money." WASHINGTON POST

Flavoured water for fickle kids

NEW YORK • Most kids do not drink enough water, according to a 2015 study in the American Journal Of Public Health.

They are so accustomed to sugary drinks, they find clear, unsweetened liquids unpalatable.

Enter a steady stream of start-ups and long-time industry players which hope to change that mindset.

Mr Gerry Khermouch, founder of industry publication Beverage Business Insights, said: "They've tried every permutation of recipe – unsweetened, juice-sweetened, naturally sweetened – and almost all inevitably fail."

New companies such as Rethink Brands and Hello Beverages are trying to reverse the trend with sugar-free, zero-calorie beverages that are essentially flavoured water in a box.

Mainstream brands like Capri Sun and Mott's have introduced better-for-you options, while Coca-Cola Co's Honest Kids drinks are available in McDonald's Happy Meals.

The beverage makers want to distance themselves from longstanding accusations that sweetened juice boxes are no better for kids than soda pop, which contributes to obesity.

To sell to mum and dad, more than three-quarters of new kids'

juices touted their lower sugar content last year, according to what its makers called "natural fruit essences". The company tried to "make water cool" by aligning with pop stars like the Jonas Brothers and Ariana Grande.

But kids love sweet drinks. And they can be fickle.

Even Kraft Heinz's Capri Sun, the long-time segment leader, has gone through three straight years of market-share decline, according to data tracker Euromonitor, even with the introduction of Fruit Refreshers and Fruit & Veggie Blends with no added sugar.

The broader industry's sales volumes in America have fallen to half of what they were in 2007.

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Take a walk for health

By ARUL JOHN

Walking is a great low-cost and easy way to be more active and has a low risk of injury.

Doing so at a brisk pace also may offer health benefits, such as lowering your risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, strengthening your bones and muscles, improving your fitness and lifting your mood.

Take note of these tips to reap its full benefits:

Set goals and make a plan to reach them

Setting realistic goals—such as walking 10 to 15 minutes, three times a week—and having a plan to reach them will improve your chances of sticking with a walking programme.

Think about the following as you set your goals and create an action plan:

Be prepared

Make sure you have everything you may need, such as

- Shoes that fit well and have good arch support, a firm, well-cushioned heel and non-skid, flexible soles;
- Clothes that are dry and comfortable;
- A hat or visor, sunscreen and sunglasses;
- Thicker clothing in cold weather that you can remove as you warm up.

Get moving

Warm up by walking slowly first. Then increase your speed to a pace fast enough to raise your heart rate while still being able to speak and breathe easily. Then cool down by slowing down.

As walking gets easier, start to go faster and farther. Climb hills or some stairs to make your walks more challenging.

Be safe

- Be aware of your surroundings;
- Walk with others, when possible, and take a cell phone and identification document, such as a driver's license, with you;
- Let your family and friends know where and when you walk;
- Wear a reflective vest or brightly coloured clothing if it is dark outside; and
- Look out for uneven or slippery streets and sidewalks or holes, rocks, or sticks that could cause falls.

This article provides general information only and is not a substitute for medical advice. Please consult medical or healthcare professionals for advice on health-related matters.

Photo: iStock



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Mr Walter Tay keeps a healthy lifestyle despite having a weakness for desserts with nuts and carrot cake. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

FitAndFab

Healthy hawker hunk

Hawker Walter Tay, who helps his father run two carrot cake stalls, is also project manager for a fitness competition

Joyce Teo

What is your secret to looking fabulous?

It helps a lot that fitness is my passion. I also watch my diet.

I've picked up tips from online fitness influencers as well as friends from the gym. As everyone's body is different, so are the training and diet requirements. I have gone through a lot of trial and error to end up with my current fitness lifestyle.

Has there ever been a time when you were not fit and fab?

I was very unhealthy and had low self-esteem as a child.

Things changed in 2005 when I took up dragon boating as my co-curricular activity in polytechnic.

I have been active since then.

What is your diet like?

I practise intermittent fasting. I skip breakfast and eat two meals a day. My first meal of the day is at around 1pm and my dinner is around 8pm. After that, I fast for 16 hours until my next meal.

What are your indulgences?

Any kind of dessert with nuts and carrot cake.

In 2017, I ate carrot cake every day as I was learning how to cook it. But now, I eat it once a week.

And I let myself go every Chinese New Year. Bak kwa, a dried pork product that is high in calories, is my weakness. My mum is a bad influence as she will tell me to "eat lah, eat lah, it's nice".

How do you maintain a healthy work-life balance?

When I am overworked or when I overeat, I would feel off-centred and have low energy.

What I do then is listen to my body and tweak what I consume or do daily.

What are the three most important things in your life?

Positivity, my loved ones and fitness.

What are your favourite and least favourite parts of your body?

My favourite part is my messy hair because I can sport a different, "fresh" look every day.

How has your active lifestyle influenced your family and friends?

My parents, elder brother, younger sister as well as my friends all maintain an active lifestyle and enjoy eating wholesome meals.

How extensive is your collection of sports-related paraphernalia?

I have just basic things, such as comfortable sportswear and swim trunks – nothing fanciful.

Would you go for plastic surgery?

No, I'm very grateful and satisfied with what I have.

Do you think you're sexy?

Yes. Everyone can feel sexy about himself.

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Fitness routine

Monday	• 45min weight training • 45min swim
Tuesday	• 45min weight training • 45min swim
Wednesday	• 30min swim
Thursday	• 45min weight training • 45min swim
Friday	• 30min swim
Saturday	• 30min swim
Sunday	• Rest

Source: WALTER TAY
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

BioBox

WALTER TAY

AGE: 30
HEIGHT: 182cm
WEIGHT: 81kg

Mr Walter Tay helps his father run two carrot cake stalls, but is not your typical frazzled hawker.

He sports an impressive physique, thanks to six months of intense workouts last year.

It helps that he has always been passionate about fitness and wants a body befitting his role as project manager of fitness competition Fitness Super Star, he says.

"My physique had always been average. I started to be serious about developing it only in May as I hoped to live up to the brand," says the bachelor, referring to the fitness competition.

"I've hired staff to run the stalls, so I exercise first thing in the morning. Before hiring them, I would train around midnight after I close the stalls."

His carrot cake stalls are at 01-23 Bukit Panjang Hawker Centre, 2 Bukit Panjang Ring Road, and 02-18 Kampung Admiralty Hawker Centre, 676 Woodlands Drive 71.

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Eric Moo to share stage with Jack Neo



Director Jack Neo (above) has been to singer Eric Moo's (left) concerts in Singapore and wants to do a solo song at the gig in March. PHOTOS: SAHIBA CHAWDHARY, ST FILE

The xinyao veteran will also have his 18-year-old daughter as a special guest at his solo concert in Singapore in March

Jan Lee

When Malaysian singer-songwriter Eric Moo holds his solo concert at the Singapore Indoor Stadium in March, his 18-year-old daughter will be appearing alongside him.

The 55-year-old's elder daughter, nicknamed Huanhuan, will be his special guest.

"I have brought my daughter on

stage with me since she was 13, so she can better understand what I do. But now that she has taken an interest in singing, she is the one who wants to appear on stage with me," he says.

His daughter recently took part in the Taiwanese reality singing competition Jungle Voice, hosted by Mandopop singers Jam Hsiao and Yoga Lin. But she failed to advance to the top 12.

In a group interview with local journalists at Singapore Press Holdings last Friday, Moo said he had told his daughter to compete without the expectation of winning.

"I told her to do it for the experience and to take it as a chance to meet more friends with similar interests."

And if she chooses to go into show business, the xinyao veteran, who became a successful singer in the 1980s and 1990s with hits like You're My Only One and Too Foolish, is not worried that the entertainment industry will have a negative influence on her.

"I believe that the education we gave her and she got at school, as

well as her faith, will keep her on the right path," says Moo, who also has a younger daughter, aged 12. His Taiwanese wife is Peng Meijun, a former model.

The singer will also be bringing a familiar face on stage with him.

He says: "(Director) Jack (Neo) has been to every one of my concerts here and he's always grumpy that I never invite him as a guest. So this time, I did."

"I thought it'll be nice for us to sing Kopi-O (1985) together, but he also wants to do a solo song. I guess it's a good thing – audiences need a toilet break after all."

Moo lives in Taipei with his family, but often travels to China for work, including appearing as a judge in music television programmes, such as King Of Mask Singer in 2015.

He first tried his hand at a singing career in Singapore.

"I was 17 when I went to a singing competition – the 1982 version of Talentine – and I got eliminated barely two lines into my song during the preliminaries," he says.

He was axed by judge S.K. Poon,

the local veteran singer better known to her fans as Pan Xiuqiong.

"I don't think she remembers this and I never told her about it," says Moo, who hopes to invite her to his concert.

He adds: "Years later, we met at a dinner. I remember her telling people, 'Look at him, he's a natural born singer.' And I felt so shiok and validated."

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What makes SMEs tick



Are two Woodstock events going to fight for big acts?

LOS ANGELES • Will there be enough big-name musicians to lure the crowds?

This issue has arisen after news came that the 50th anniversary of the Woodstock music festival, one of the watersheds of the 1960s counter-culture movement, would be celebrated in August with two competing events.

Mr Michael Lang, co-producer of the 1969 Woodstock bash, announced last week that the official Woodstock Music and Arts Fair would take place from Aug 16 to 18 at a motor-racing venue in upstate New York.

Last month, the Bethel Woods Centre for the Arts, the current owner of the field where the 1969 celebration took place, revealed that it would mark the 50th anniversary with a "pan-generational event" on the same dates.

"The original festival in 1969 was a reaction by the youth of the time to the causes we felt compelled to fight for – civil rights, women's rights and the anti-war movement, and it gave way to our mission to share peace, love and music," Mr Lang said in a statement.

"Today, we're experiencing similar disconnects in our country and one thing we've learnt is that music



An original ticket at the site of the 1969 Woodstock Music Festival in Bethel, New York, where one 50th-anniversary event will take place. PHOTO: REUTERS

has the power to bring people together. So, it's time to bring the Woodstock spirit back, get involved and make our voices heard."

The 1969 edition, billed as "three days of peace and music", is regarded as one of the pivotal moments in music history. Over three sometimes-rainy days, more than 30 acts – including Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, The Who, The Band and Grateful Dead – performed around the clock to a 400,000-strong audience, most of whom watched for free and camped on site in the mud.

The festival was documented in the 1970 film Woodstock, which won an Oscar.

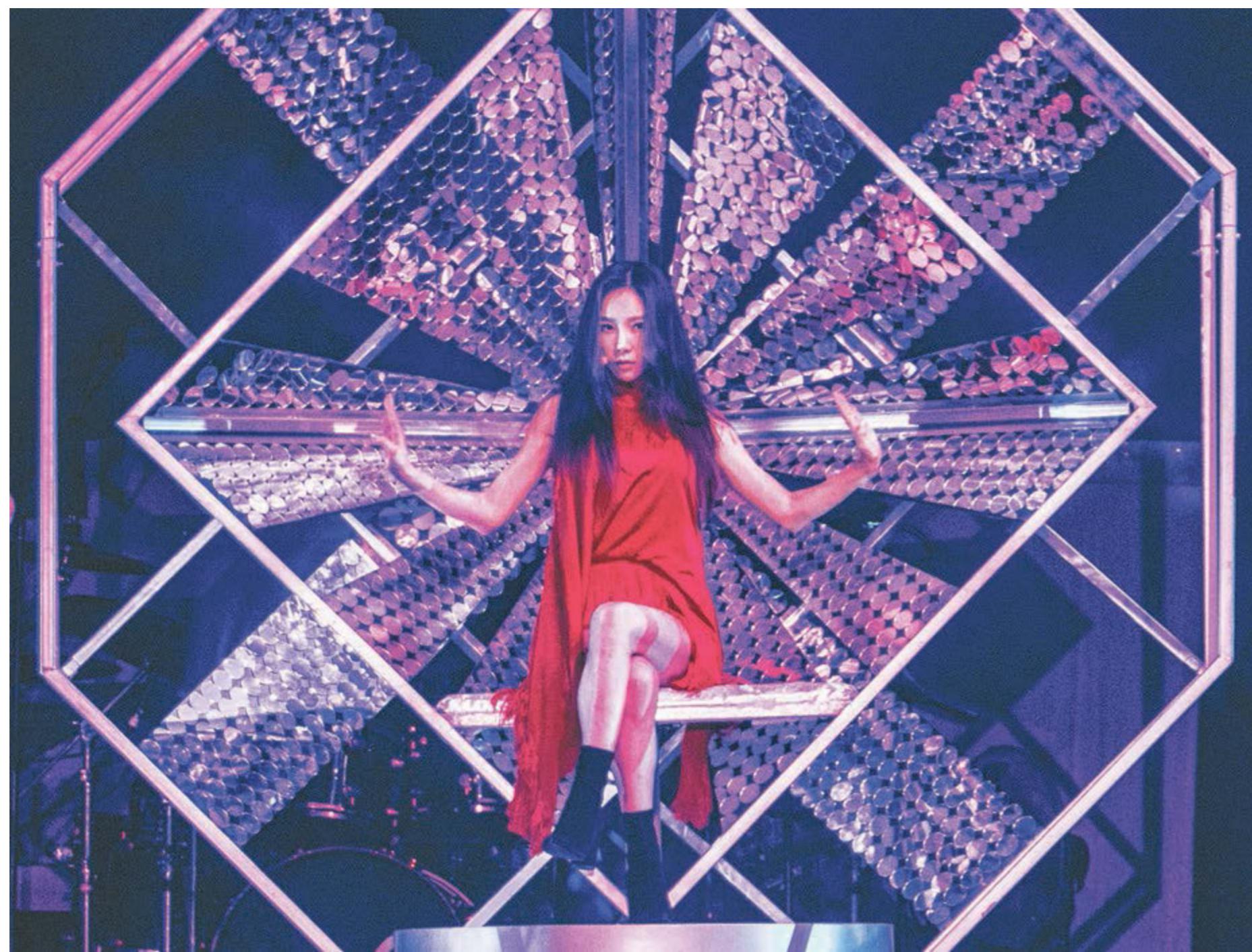
Mr Lang did not announce this

year's performer line-up, but said more than 60 musicians would take part on three main stages at Watkins Glen International, the site of car-racing events.

"It will be primarily contemporary talent, but the legacy acts will be represented and honoured," said Mr Lang, referring to the surviving musicians, now in their 70s, who continue to perform.

Although it was known as Woodstock, the 1969 festival actually took place in Bethel, some 110km south of the village of Woodstock and 144km north of New York City.

Watkins Glen, which has a larger crowd capacity, is about 320km north of New York City. REUTERS



A show with ups and downs

K-pop singer Taeyeon has a huge voice, but her singing was not consistent and the stage set-ups were awkward

REVIEW/CONCERT

'...TAEYEON CONCERT IN SINGAPORE
Singapore Expo Hall 1
Last Saturday

Jan Lee

Heading into singer Taeyeon's first solo concert here in Singapore, I was surprised to learn that the leader of iconic South Korean girl group SNSD, or Girls' Generation, is turning 30 in two months.

I am used to K-pop idols looking younger than their age, but I have al-

ways thought of SNSD and their members - who became wildly popular in my secondary school days with addictive bubblegum hits like Gee (2009) - as, well, girls.

But watching Taeyeon last Saturday at the Singapore Expo has, firstly, made me realise that Gee, a veritable anthem in my school back then, is a decade old and the members have matured.

The singer, who debuted with SNSD in 2007, embarked on solo promotions in 2015 with her debut EP titled I.

She steered clear of the well-known early hits of the group, opting instead for SNSD songs such as Holiday and All Night, both released in 2017.

Taeyeon, considered SNSD's best singer, was at ease, confident and effortlessly sexy.

She did not wear provocative costumes or pull off risqué dance

moves. Instead, her rendition of groovy tracks like Something New and All Night Long, coupled with her hair flips, winks and waves at the audience, all exuded a natural appeal.

Her petite frame also belies her huge voice, which hit some difficult high notes beautifully, eliciting cheers from the crowd.

But she was not always consistent, especially in the first segment of the concert, where she had some problems with pitching and sounded strained.

As the concert went on, her voice warmed up, landing one final powerful punch at the end of her encore with the song I.

The execution of the 2½-hour concert was not quite ideal.

Taeyeon opened the show with some elaborately stage set-ups.

She sang the third song of the night, Fire, on a round platform

that was lifted into the air before landing back on stage after a few verses. In the next number, she held onto ropes as she twirled in mid-air and then dancers pushed her as if she was on a swing.

There was clearly a lot of effort put in, but, unfortunately, it all came off looking rather awkward.

Rather than adding all these bells and whistles, a pared-down concert focusing on Taeyeon's vocals and works would have made for a more enjoyable experience.

janlee@sph.com.sg

Taeyeon exuded a natural appeal without wearing provocative costumes or making risqué dance moves.
PHOTO: IMC LIVE GLOBAL

Going beyond the familiar with Reich

REVIEW/CONCERT

REICH IN 60 MINUTES
Singapore Symphony Orchestra
Brad Lubman (conductor)
Victoria Concert Hall
Last Saturday

Marc Rochester

The first of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra's (SSO) new Red Balloon concert series, which presents "convention-defying music and genres", did not quite go according to plan.

Instead of the promised 60 minutes of Steve Reich, concertgoers had 40 minutes of his music and around another 40 minutes of music by Bela Bartok.

Add to that the concert's late start and two extended on-stage commentaries given to drown out the clutter of major stage reorganisations and audiences had an event which lasted as long as a full-length evening concert.

A part of the plan which did survive was that of taking the SSO beyond its familiar territory of late-19th/early-20th century repertoire.

The music of Reich may be about the most accessible there is by a contemporary composer and it has already attracted an enthusiastic following in Singapore in the wake of recent visits by high-profile Reich-performing ensembles.

The American composer himself came here a while back and performed before a packed and adulatory Esplanade audience.

The two Reich works performed at this concert - Pulse and City Life - make for arresting listening and, as conductor Brad Lubman eloquently revealed, are marvellous pieces of music.

Pulse, apparently receiving its Singapore premiere, carried on relentlessly above a pounding bass guitar, but lacked any variety of tone or colour; while the famous City Life, cleverly intermingling sampled street sounds from New York with orchestral effects, managed to sound remarkably ordinary despite Lubman's obvious involvement in the music.

But what emerged most powerfully from these performances was a sense of such intense concentration from the players that one almost expected to see smoke billowing from their ears.

There was plenty of musical

smoke wafting around, but that was part of the weird, almost spooky soundscape of Bartok's Music For Strings, Percussion And Celesta.

The reason for its incongruous inclusion appeared to be that it was written in 1936, the same year Reich was born. But it was a good choice in that it gave the SSO the opportunity to play something more firmly in its comfort zone.

From the desiccated, eerie viola theme which opens the work to the raucous razzmatazz of the finale, the orchestra was clearly in its element.

The percussion section delivered its parts with the flair, dynamism and brilliance concertgoers have come to expect of it, while Shane Thio was a rock-solid presence on the piano. Whether or not Aya Sakou was equally adept must remain a mystery - from my vantage point in the balcony, her celesta was totally inaudible.

Only one person seemed uneasy with all this musical fun: maestro Lubman. His rigid, sharply focused beat gave the work a certain militaristic character, but marched right past all the many moments of musical magic with barely a sideways glance.

Fashion under attack in New York and Paris

NEW YORK • Fashion houses are deserting New York as online competition changes the business model.

Lord & Taylor closed its 104-year-old flagship store in Fifth Avenue early this month. Gap is set to move out of its massive Fifth Avenue outlet.

Now comes news that Calvin Klein plans to close its flagship store in Madison Avenue this spring.

According to a statement from the company, the brand has adopted a digital-first approach and will re-organise its North American division, combining operations in sportswear and jeans.

"These strategic initiatives will enable us to run a more modern, dynamic and effective business, as well as allow us to reinvest in the brand," said Mr Steve Shiffman, chief executive of Calvin Klein.

"Now more than ever, we must double down on meeting consumer demands by creating culturally relevant products and experiences that engage communities by pushing fashion and culture forward."

Over in Paris, the brands are not moving out, but are at risk of attacks.

Luxury brand Dior said last week it was bringing forward its Paris Fashion Week show this weekend, after its flagship shop was looted during "yellow vests" protests.

Its men's spring-summer show was to have taken place on Saturday, when more anti-government protests are likely in the city.

Demonstrators had smashed up Dior's Champs Elysees boutique on Nov 26, stealing goods and causing damage reportedly to the tune of €1 million (S\$1.55 million). Others scrawled graffiti that mocked the rich and immigrants.

Luxury boutiques have become a frequent target of the protests, which began in November as a revolt against a rise in fuel prices, but which have since morphed into an expression of general discontent.

Chanel, which protected the windows of its shops with fashionably black plywood cladding, has also become a magnet for graffiti.

American designer Thom Browne also moved his Saturday show to earlier in the day, while other brands have so far not said whether they will be affected.

Many Paris fashion shows traditionally take place near the Champs Elysees, which has been the focus for the "yellow vests" weekly Saturday demonstrations that often end in violence.

Police have tried to contain protesters by closing train stations and redirecting traffic from the area.

The Paris men's fashion week begins tomorrow and is followed by the haute couture shows, which will run until Jan 24.

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Chris Pang (far left), who appeared in box-office hit *Crazy Rich Asians*, with John Harlan Kim (left), who had a four-season stint on *The Librarians*.
PHOTO: NYTIMES

Asian-Australian actors flourish in Hollywood

After struggling to find work beyond stereotypes, they are becoming more visible in the US, where the market is bigger

MELBOURNE • They have found a home in Hollywood, appearing in some of the biggest films and television shows of the year.

But on a balmy evening last month, several young Asian-Australian actors were relaxing together in a place where they are rarely recognised – the country where they grew up.

Over beers at a rooftop bar in Melbourne, they were reflecting on their year's work.

"It's the most I have ever auditioned," said John Harlan Kim, 25, a Korean-Australian actor who moved to the United States five years ago and recently wrapped a four-season stint on *The Librarians*.

Chris Pang, 34, who appeared in last year's box-office hit *Crazy Rich*

Asians, agreed. "Right now, diverse content is selling and it's hot," he said. "It's now or never. We've got to keep the momentum going."

For many of Australia's most lauded white actors, making a name for themselves at home was a critical milestone on the way to success in Hollywood.

But Asian-Australian actors say there are few roles available for them in Australia and those parts are often ancillary or based on out-dated stereotypes.

So many Asian-Australian actors are heading straight to Los Angeles – and succeeding.

There is still much to overcome. Many actors of Asian descent say they continue to be overlooked, especially for major roles. And yet

for some, this feels like a moment of promise.

The worldwide success of *Crazy Rich Asians* and critically acclaimed performances by Asian-American actors, including Sandra Oh (*Killing Eve*, 2018 to present) and Lana Condor (*To All The Boys I've Loved Before*, 2018), has created an incentive for more diverse casts as Hollywood (parts of it, at least) seems to be learning that multicultural entertainment is good for business.

According to a study last year by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the top-grossing global films increasingly have casts that are increasingly diverse, even though the majority is white.

"Films with casts that were from 21 to 30 per cent minority enjoyed the highest median global box-office receipts and the highest median return on investment," the study said.

According to UCLA, the percentage of films with predominantly white casts fell to 37 per cent in 2016, from 51 per cent in 2011.

Also in 2016, the most recent year for which there is comprehensive data, Asian actors appeared in 3.1 per cent of Hollywood film roles, compared with 12 per cent for black actors and 78 per cent for whites.

Asian-Australian actors, in particular, are becoming more visible.

Malaysian-Australian actor Jordan Rodrigues appeared in the 2017 hit *Lady Bird*.

Natasha Liu Bordizzo, who grew up in Sydney, appeared in *The Greatest Showman* (2017) and *Hotel Mumbai* (2018).

Remy Hii, who was in *Crazy Rich*

Asians, will star in the next *Spider-Man* film; and Desmond Chiam is set to star in *Reef Break*, a crime thriller to air in the United States this year on ABC.

Their success overseas in such a wide range of roles has amplified a conversation in Australia about whether the country's entertainment industry needs to be more inclusive.

It has been a particularly busy year for Pang. Besides his role in *Crazy Rich Asians*, he produced a drama called *Empty By Design* and wrapped up filming for an upcoming *Charlie's Angels* reboot.

But success, he said, was hard-fought and happened only when he was willing to leave Australia.

Pang, who is of Taiwanese and Chinese descent, started acting more than 10 years ago after a job as a telephone salesman landed him at the door of a casting agency.

Agency staff members bought three phones and asked if he could do a Chinese accent. Suddenly, he was being paid for a voice-over in the Jackie Chan film *New Police Story* (2004).

Soon after, he travelled around China and Hong Kong looking for roles. Eventually, he landed what looked like a breakthrough turn in *Tomorrow, When The War Began*, a dystopian action film that became Australia's highest-grossing movie in 2010.

But Pang struggled to find work after that. In 2013, a cast-mate persuaded him to move to Los Angeles.

"I definitely wouldn't be here now if I didn't make that move," he said.

According to some industry insiders, it is not that Hollywood is necessarily more open-minded; it is just bigger.

"If we get anyone of even (the smallest talent), they jump ship", said Mr Adam Ross, chairman of the Australian Film Critics Association.

One reason work is hard to find in Australia, he said, is simply due to a smaller, younger and less lucrative film industry.

The US film industry and market is "an infinitely bigger machine", he said. "There's probably only half a dozen studio films, compared with half a hundred in America."

Some industry gatekeepers are beginning to take note.

Government agencies like Screen Australia are making a concerted effort to fund diverse programming. Broadcasters like SBS are airing shows like *The Family Law*, which follows the travails of a Chinese-Australian family.

But still, according to Screen Australia's 2016 report, non-white actors appear on TV and in movies at about half the rate they are present in the population.

Increasingly, those who want to see their stories told are taking film-making into their own hands.

"Sometimes, you have to just do it yourself," said Matthew Victor Pastor, a Filipino-Australian director.

Inspired by a trip to Los Angeles in 2017, he has written and directed six largely independent feature films in the past 18 months.

"It's about seeing those faces," he said. "It's about seeing those stories. It has a lot of weight." NYTIMES

Film boom in Russian arctic region

YAKUTSK (Russia) • In Russia's remote Yakutia region, the film industry is booming, despite shooting schedules being restricted by some of the coldest winters on Earth and directors blaming "spirits" for disturbing the production crew.

Six time zones away from the country's film schools and without central state funding for its filmmakers, the region produces half of all Russian movies made outside St Petersburg and Moscow.

"Everybody wants to make movies," said Alexei Romanov, who turned his back on a promising career as a film-maker in St Petersburg three decades ago to return to his native Siberia.

"We have films with minuscule budgets and hilariously small fees, but they make more in the cinemas here than Hollywood block-busters," he said.

When he returned to Yakutia, a vast territory that is home to fewer than a million people, the industry consisted of just two cameramen.

Now, thanks in part to his efforts, people are "fighting for cameras" to finish their projects before equipment starts failing in winter temperatures that drop to minus 50 deg C.

Romanov estimated an average local film budget to be between US\$40,000 (S\$54,000) and



Lyubov Borisova doing the sound editing for her directorial debut, about a man sent to work on an isolated island in the Arctic. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

US\$80,000. Most actors work for free on skeleton budgets, hoping to eventually get paid from box-office revenues.

But domestic and foreign audiences are starting to notice the region's output.

The Lord Eagle, a Yakutian film about an elderly couple living with an eagle in the forest, won the top prize at the Moscow Film Festival last year.

South Korea's Busan Film Festival showed in 2017 a dozen Yakutian productions in a special retrospec-

tive, praising their cinematic style. Locals jokingly call Yakutia's movie industry "Sakhawood", derived from the region's other name, the Republic of Sakha.

Yakutia's unexplored wildernesses, steeped in folk legends and shamanic traditions, have piqued festival interest, but Sakhawood's genres are surprisingly varied.

Recent premieres have included Republic Z, a zombie apocalypse sparked by a virus buried in permafrost. Another new release was Cheeke, a crime comedy about

disco dance-offs, featuring a hero with a green moustache.

Romanov – one of the founders of Sakhafilm, Yakutia's main production company – said global art-house interest could be explained by Yakutia's mixed culture.

"We're Asians, on the one hand, and Northerners, on the other", combining themes of survival with Turkic heritage, he said.

"Sakha cinema combines regional legends and folk religions with contemporary values," said Mr Park, a programmer for the Busan festival's selection committee.

The region's remoteness not only adds to its allure, but it has also helped keep its independent cinema alive.

"We are lucky we are so far away from everything and big distributors never took over our theatres," said film-maker Lyubov Borisova, as she worked on sound editing for her directorial debut, filmed last summer.

The region's isolation makes it "unattractive" to large chains, which favour Hollywood block-busters and shut out locally made films, she said.

Premieres in the region's main city Yakutsk are more community affairs than celebrity galas. People often turn up because a relative was involved in the film's production.

At the opening of award-winning

The Lord Eagle, guests were treated to pancakes. Discerning local audiences use Instagram now to issue their verdict, said Borisova.

"Our viewers are very capricious and they know we read all the comments so they address us directly. 'Don't film like that anymore,' she said.

Her movie about a young man sent to work on an isolated island in the Arctic has the working title, The Sun Never Sets, and will be finished in spring. She said the crew worked on the coast of the Laptev Sea for a month, living in an abandoned wing of a village clinic.

The production team constantly heard "spirits" in the building, she added, which they had to ward off by "feeding the fire" – a Yakut tradition of offering small pieces of bread to a furnace.

In his youth, Romanov studied under Sergei Gerasimov, a Soviet director after whom Moscow's famous film school is named.

"He always told me, 'Don't invent anything, film what you know and don't copy anybody'. And that's what we teach our film-makers," he said.

With that in mind, young directors have found success waiting for them at home in Yakutia. "Nobody wants to leave," he said.

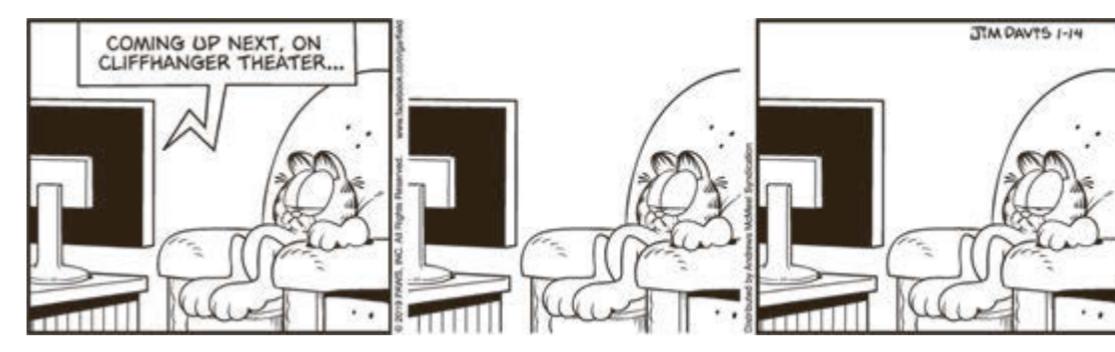
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Comics

BABY BLUES



GARFIELD



Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 15 (HD) (PG) (V)
6.50 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (V)
7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)
9.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (IE)
10.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (V)
10.30 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
11.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (V)
PM
12.00 Martha Bakes 6 (IE)
12.30 Secret Meat Business (IE)
1.00 Films & Stars (PG) (V)
1.30 Kin (HD) (PG) (CC) (V)
2.00 Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 3 (SC)
2.30 Super Mum Super Dad (HD) (V)
3.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
4.00 Meet The MP (HD) (PG) (SC)
4.30 America's Got Talent 12 (HD) (PG) (V)
5.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
6.30 Divided (US) (HD) (PG) (V)
7.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (HD) (CC) (V)
7.30 Little Big Shots US3 (CC) (V)
8.30 Kin (HD) (PG) (CC) (V)
9.00 News 5 With Highlights From Parliament
9.45 Weird Food Diaries (HD) (PG) (IE)
10.15 Avenue 14 (PG13) (D)
11.10 Grimm 6 (PG13) (D)
AM
12.00 Kin (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)
12.30 Whacked Out Sports (PG) (V)
12.50 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
1.40 This Is Us (HD) (PG13) (D)
2.30 Euromaxx (Cul)
3.00 Arts 21 (Cul)
3.30 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
3.55 Martha Bakes 6 (IE)
4.20 Secret Meat Business (IE)
4.45 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (V)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 10 (IE)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 3-Plus-13 (V)
7.00 Tuesday Report - Ninety Years Young (CC) (IE)

7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (HD) (News)
8.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (HD) (News)
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 Food And Beverage Investigators 8 (IE)
10.30 Night Market Life Aka Life (PG) (D)
PM
12.30 Body SOS 7 (PG) (CC) (V)
1.00 News 8 At One (HD)
1.30 Focus (CC) (CA)
2.00 Beijing Opera Cats (S)
2.30 Your Hand In Mine (HD) (CC) (D)
3.30 Love Thy Neighbour (PG) (CC) (D)
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)
5.30 iWalker - James 4 (HD) (IE)
2.15 Changing Fortunes (D) (Finale)
4.10 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)
AM
12.15 The Princess Weiyoung (PG) (D)
1.15 iWalker - James 4 (HD) (IE)
2.15 Changing Fortunes (D) (Finale)
4.10 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)
CHANNEL U
PM
3.00 Markets In Asia (CC) (IE)
4.00 Find Me A Singaporean 3 (IE)
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 The Menu (PG) (CC) (D)
7.00 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Blue Tick (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 Brother's Keeper 2 (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 News Tonight With Highlights From Parliament
11.45 Blue Tick (PG) (CC) (D)
AM
12.40 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)
2.30 Close
CNA
AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
6.30 Money Mind

7.00 First Look Asia

8.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)

9.00 Asia Business First

10.02 Bronze: A Forgotten Treasure

11.00 News Now

PM

1.02 Law Of The Land

2.00 News Now

4.02 Edible Wild

4.30 Made In Singapore

5.00 News Now

7.02 Law Of The Land (CC)

7.30 Super Octogenarians (CC)

8.00 Primetime Asia

9.02 Why It Matters 2 (CC)

10.00 Singapore Tonight

11.02 Law Of The Land

AM

12.00 News Now

12.30 Money Mind

1.02 Why It Matters 2 (CC)

2.00 News Now

2.30 Once A Refugee

3.02 Edible Wild

3.30 Made In Singapore

4.00 News Now

4.30 Once A Refugee

5.02 Why It Matters 2 (CC)

Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)
3.30 Azhagiya Snehit 2 (IE)
4.00 Sundaram Kudumbathin (HD) (D)
4.30 Enna Nadakuthu 6 (HD) (V)
5.30 Mottu Patlu 3 (S)
6.00 Raama Seetha 2 (Telugu) (D)
7.00 Konjam Soru Konjam Varalaru 2 (IE)
7.30 Mella Thiranthathu Katavu 3 (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Uyire (PG) (D)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Ms V Supreme 2019 (V)
10.00 Tamil Silver Screen: Kolamavu Kokila
AM
12.30 Close

OKTO

AM
9.00 Twirlywoos (P)
9.30 Teddies (P)
10.00 Dokis (P)
10.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)
11.00 Dora The Explorer (HD) (P)
11.30 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)

PM

12.00 Bugsville (P)
12.30 Teddies (HD) (IE)
1.00 Little Charmers (HD) (P)
1.30 Twirlywoos (P)
2.00 Dokis (P)
2.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)
3.00 Dora The Explorer (HD) (P)
(P)
3.30 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)
4.00 All Over The Workplace (S)
4.30 Captain Flinn And The Pirate Dinosaurs (S)
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (S)
5.30 Grizzy & The Lemmings (S)
AM
6.00 The Lion Guard (S)
6.30 Word Whiz Or Slime Pit (PG) (S)
7.00 Dolphin Tale (PG) (CC) (M)
9.00 BWF Grand Prix - Scottish Open 2018 (Sports)
11.00 American Ninja Warrior 6 (HD) (PG) (Sports)
AM
12.00 Close

SURIYA

PM
3.00 Juxbox Ekspres
4.00 Seinard Takdir Cinta (HD) (PG) (D)
5.00 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 BoBoiBoy Galaxy (HD) (S)
6.30 E.A.T. (HD) (CC) (IE)
7.00 Teratai Kemboja (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Reka (HD) (CC) (IE)
9.30 Mak Cun 4 (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)
10.30 Alam Maya (PG) (CC) (D)
11.30 Berita (HD) (News) (R)
AM
12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs; CC: Closed Caption; Cul: Culture; D: Drama; I: Info-Ed; M: Movies; P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance; R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom; V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singteltv.com.sg

The Stars Say

Aries (March 21 - April 19)

You need to reinforce your core values – they keep you going. Take a break from the daily grind.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

An investment is showing a return. Organise a party – your energy is just right for a celebration.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)

It is a day of tall tales. Make sure everyone gets to shine and the entertainment never stops.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)

Your wildest ideas may not work out, but they may pave the way for even more intriguing options.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)

You have scored a major accomplishment, but you should let others blow your horn for you.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)

Your mental energy is strong – see if you can dig up new information and figure things out.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)

Show how gracious you are when entertaining guests or making a new colleague feel welcome.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)

Whether it is morning traffic or bureaucratic red tape, you need to find a way to speed through an obstacle.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)

Listen carefully to your people – you need more sincere connections to break through.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)

Go through things thoroughly – your mental energy will help to take care of every detail.

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)

Your past is catching up with you. See if you can get a clue before it smacks you in the face.

Pisces (Feb 19 - March 20)

You are feeling earthier and more domestic than usual – make a good meal and indulge yourself.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
7.35 Forged In Fire 3
8.30 American Ripper
9.30 Vanished/11.20 Mountain Men 6
PM
12.15 Swamp People 9
1.10 The Pickers 12/2.05 Pawn Stars 18
2.35 Forged In Fire 3
3.30 Vanished/5.20 American Ripper
6.15 The Pickers 17/7.10 Counting Cars 5
8.05 Storage Wars: Texas 6
8.30 Storage Wars 10
9.00 The Cars That Made America
10.50 History Drama: Vikings 5
11.45 Swamp People 9

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
7.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown
8.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
9.00 Scraps/10.00 Seabelt Psychic
11.00 Zoo 3
PM
12.00 Dance Moms 6
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
2.00 Unlikely Acts
3.35 The Rap Game 3
4.30 Little Women LA: Terra's Little Family
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
6.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown
7.00 Live PD Presents: Women On Patrol
8.00 Leah Remini: Scientology & The Aftermath
9.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
10.00 The Wrong Student
11.35 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
7.45 Molly's Game (NC16)
10.00 True Detective 3 (NC16)
PM
12.00 Transformers: The Last Knight (NC16)/2.35 Leap Year
4.15 Despicable Me 3
5.45 The Finest Hours (2016)
7.40 Blood Diamond (NC16)
10.00 True Detective 3 (NC16)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
7.00 Foxfire/8.35 The Babysitter
10.00 The Others (NC16)
11.45 Johnny English
PM
1.15 John Carpenter's Escape From L.A.
2.55 The Game Plan
4.45 The Jetsons & WWE: Robo-Wrestlemania
6.10 Switchback/8.10 Tango One (NC16)
10.00 Rock Star/11.45 Strike Back 3 (M18)

HUB CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
7.00 Tomorrow With You (HD)
8.15 Hot Door Night XV (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
7.00 Snooker: World Championship 2018
International Highlights Quarter-finals 1 & 2/10.30 Snooker: World Championship 2018
International Highlights Quarter-finals 3 & 4
PM
2.00 Tennis: ATP 250 Tata Open Maharashtra 2019 Quarter-finals: 5.30 Tennis: Deuce 2018
6.00 Mountain Bike: Enduro World Series 2018: Italy Highlights:
6.30 Mountain Bike: Enduro World Series 2018: Season Review Highlights:
7.00 Presidential Cycling Tour Of Turkey 2018 Highlights:
8.00 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
8.30 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
9.30 Volleyball Nations League 2018
Women Final Rounds – Semi-finals 1 (Brazil Vs Turkey)

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
7.15 Dowry (HD)
10.15 Unlimited Song Season (HD)
11.45 Travel Together 2 (HD)
PM
12.15 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)/13.00 Tomorrow With You (HD)
2.45 Where Are We Going, Dad? 5 (HD)
4.45 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)/6.00 Dowry (HD)
7.00 Hot Door Night XV (HD)
8.00 Perfect Dating VI (HD)
9.30 Hong Kong Neighbourhood Gems (HD)/10.00 The King's Woman (HD)
11.00 Hot Door Night XV (HD)

HUB SPORTS 3 (CHANNEL 203)

AM
7.00 Snooker: World Championship 2018
International Highlights Quarter-finals 1 & 2/10.30 Snooker: World Championship 2018
International Highlights Quarter-finals 3 & 4
PM
2.00 Tennis: ATP 250 Tata Open Maharashtra 2019 Quarter-finals: 5.30 Tennis: Deuce 2018
6.00 Mountain Bike: Enduro World Series 2018: Italy Highlights:
6.30 Mountain Bike: Enduro World Series 2018: Season Review Highlights:
7.00 Presidential Cycling Tour Of Turkey 2018 Highlights:
8.00 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
8.30 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
9.30 Volleyball Nations League 2018
Women Final Rounds – Semi-finals 1 (Brazil Vs Turkey)

Singtel TV (CHANNEL 226)

AM
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
8.00 Teen Titans Go!
9.00 Grizzy And The Lemm

Avengers to host Oscars?

LOS ANGELES • The easy part will be wrapped up today when a week-long window for the 7,902 members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to submit their nominations for the Oscar Awards on Feb 24 closes.

But the hard part – finding a replacement host after original choice

Kevin Hart pulled out over his homophobic comments – remains.

Trade publication Variety reported last week that the organisers were thinking of going without a single host.

Now, reports have surfaced that the organisers are in talks to rope in a phalanx of Avengers actors to

“save” the event.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, the possible candidates include Robert Downey Jr (Iron Man), Chris Evans (Captain America), Jeremy Renner (Hawkeye) and Samuel L. Jackson (Nick Fury).

Their mission on Feb 24?

To introduce segments of the

show as it chugs along.

But will the Avengers crew agree? Fans think so, given that the actors will have a platform on Feb 24 to generate tonnes of valuable – and free – publicity for the Avengers: Endgame movie, which will be released on April 26 in America.

Disney owns the Marvel franchise

and also ABC, which is broadcasting the Oscars, so it could be easier to pull strings to salvage the situation.

In the 90-year history of the Academy Awards, the ceremony has been held without a host only five times.

The most recent occasion was in 1989, but that strategy reportedly

did not go down well with viewers.

With the Oscars suffering a ratings dip in recent years – last year's telecast slumped 20 per cent over the previous year's tally – the fear of a further backlash may well make the organisers still hold out hopes of roping in a big name as a single host.

On social media



TEEN ON BIRD BOX CHALLENGE IN ACCIDENT: Do not blindly follow what you see on Netflix.

That is the advice from the police in the American state of Utah after a teen drove a truck blindfolded and got into an accident (right).

In the Netflix hit Bird Box, a mother, played by Sandra Bullock (above), has to attempt a treacherous river escape with her two children, with all blindfolded to avoid catching a glimpse of a malevolent entity that makes people kill themselves.

The Layton police department



Parkway. Luckily no injuries."

The unnamed teen, her 16-year-old passenger and occupants of the car she hit escaped serious injury.

The teen was taking part in the "Bird Box Challenge", where folk record themselves doing tasks blindfolded, reported various media.

But the police are not turning a blind eye to what happened. Lieutenant Travis Lyman said the teen would be charged with reckless driving.

Last week, Netflix urged fans to skip the challenge. PHOTOS:

LAYTON POLICE/TWITTER, NETFLIX



British singer Anne-Marie (left) is in the running for four prizes, including British Female Solo Artist and British Album of the Year for Speak Your Mind, at the Feb 20 Brit Awards. PHOTO: ANNE-MARIE/INSTAGRAM

TV host Megyn Kelly gets \$4lm payout from NBC

NEW YORK • Megyn Kelly and NBC News have agreed to the high-profile television host's exit terms, which will allow her to leave the company with a US\$30-million (\$41-million) payout.

The news comes after months of negotiations over parts of her contract following her removal in October from NBC's morning show Today.

Kelly will leave NBC with the remainder of her US\$69-million contract, according to NBC News.

The former Fox News anchor was removed as the host of NBC's morning fixture following a Halloween segment, when she questioned why using "blackface" for a costume was inappropriate.

What is next for Kelly who first made her name as a Fox News anchor? Pundits do not think that the NBC settlement prevents her from joining a rival network.

Indeed, asked by paparazzi last week if she would be back on TV, she said: "You will definitely see me back on."

LONDON • When a netizen labelled British singer Anne-Marie as "talent-less", she stayed calm, posting simply: "Actually, I think you'll find I'm really good at cooking peanut butter on toast."

But she is actually quite adept at music-making, joining Dua Lipa, Jess Glynne and George Ezra among the just-announced nominees for next month's Brit Awards, Britain's annual pop music honours, in a list dominated by young talent.

Anne-Marie, 27, is in the running for four prizes, including British Female Solo Artist and British Album

of the Year for Speak Your Mind, at the event on Feb 20 in London.

Glynne's name also featured in four categories, including British Female Solo Artist and British Single for I'll Be There.

The other contenders for British Female Solo Artist are Florence + The Machine, Lily Allen and Jorja Smith, last year's Critics' Choice winner.

Summer hit Shotgun singer Ezra got three nods for British Male Solo Artist, British Single and his album Staying At Tamara's. He will compete against Sam Smith, Craig

David, Aphex Twin and Giggs for British Male Solo Artist.

The album category, the biggest prize on the night, also includes Florence + The Machine's High As Hope and The 1975's A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships.

Mr Geoff Taylor, chief executive of the Brit Awards and the British Phonographic Industry, said: "If you look at the list, it's really fresh, really young, really diverse, really female."

"(It's) a really great list that reflects the year of music and shows just how much fresh talent is coming through." REUTERS

BTS topic in university entrance exam stirs debate

SEOUL • Is it a fair test of your abilities if you are asked to "draw an object based on your image of BTS"?

What if you have zero knowledge of the South Korean boyband?

These issues have stirred up debate after Seoul Women's University tapped BTS for an entrance examination linked to its ceramics and fibre arts major, reported The Korea Herald.

In the hyper-competitive Korean

education sector, some high-school students focus exclusively on their studies, even cutting themselves off from the Internet and television in the final year, to better prepare for the entrance tests.

But other netizens defended the university's decision, saying that examination takers did not have to know who BTS were, or even what the members looked like, since the students were instructed to come

up with an image based only on their perception of BTS.

They added that the purpose of the test was not to produce images closely resembling the K-pop act, but to express creativity with the topic.

It is not the first time students have been quizzed about the K-pop sensation. BTS popped up in Seoul National University's essay-writing last year and Korean Broadcasting System's recruitment tests.

the newpaper

Hed Chef

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The best ingredients
tnp.sg/lifestyle



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ENTRY CHARGE TO YISHUN TURTLE MUSEUM
FOR ADULT SINGAPORE RESIDENTS B4-5

Social enterprise hawkers get 5-day week

They feel relieved to have more flexibility under new rules, but say more can be done

Cheryl Teh

More than one-third of the hawkers at the Hawker Centre @ Our Tampines Hub, one of Singapore's seven social enterprise hawker centres (SEHCs), have opted to take two full days off a week.

The option to work five days a week was given to the stallholders under new regulations to protect the interests of SEHC hawkers. Previously, they could take a day off only if they stayed open for 24 hours, six days a week.

As of Jan 1, the National Environment Agency (NEA) will require SEHC hawkers to work only five days a week or eight hours a day.

Hawkers can work longer hours or on more days, if they so wish.

As of November last year, the Our Tampines Hub SEHC was the only hawker centre out of 114 in Singapore to operate round the clock.

But despite a third of the hawkers opting to take two days off, a large number of stallholders have chosen to operate more than eight hours a day to maximise their sales.

An NEA spokesman said more than 80 per cent of the 42 stalls at the Our Tampines Hub SEHC chose to continue to operate between 12 and 16 hours daily.



This is similar to the opening hours of stallholders at other existing hawker centres.

The seven SEHCs, run by five social enterprises, came under public

scrutiny last year when some hawkers at SEHCs complained about unfair contracts and long working hours.

On Nov 19 last year, Senior Minis-

ter of State for the Environment and Water Resources Amy Khor outlined in Parliament three areas her ministry would focus on to improve the SEHC model.

The NEA has reviewed the key terms of contract between the five operators of Singapore's seven SEHCs and the hawkers, and has asked the operators to make

Over a third of the hawkers at the Hawker Centre @ Our Tampines Hub have opted to take two days off each week. Previously, they could take a day off only if they stayed open for 24 hours, six days a week.

ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

MORE FLEXIBILITY

I still work six days a week, 14 hours a day, but I feel better that I have the option not to if I need a break.

“

MR H.K. WEE, in his 40s, a hawker at a noodle stall in Ci Yuan SEHC. As of Jan 1, the National Environment Agency will require SEHC hawkers to work only five days a week or eight hours a day. They can work longer hours or on more days, if they so wish.

changes to contractual terms with effect from Jan 1.

According to an NEA spokesman,

MORE CAN BE DONE continued on B2



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"Nicotine Containing Products" shown at an e-cigarette meet at the Royal Academy in London in 2013. The HSA advised the public not to buy e-vaporisers, either from the Internet or from overseas. They should also discard those in their possession. PHOTO: AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

Vaping: 67 offenders nabbed

Number caught since February last year when it became illegal to buy, use or possess harmful or imitation tobacco products

Theresa Tan
Senior Social Affairs Correspondent

Sixty-seven people were caught using electronic vaporisers (e-vaporisers) in the 10 months since they were outlawed last February, new figures reveal.

Another 245 have been nabbed for selling the devices in the last

five years, the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) has told The Straits Times.

E-vaporisers – which include e-cigarettes and e-cigars – are battery-powered devices that heat a liquid (called vape juice) containing nicotine, producing a vapour that is inhaled.

From Feb 1 last year, it became illegal to buy, use or possess harmful or imitation tobacco products like e-vaporisers with offenders facing fines of up to \$2,000.

However, the ban on the sale of such products started way back.

Since 1993, it has been an offence to sell, distribute or import imitation tobacco products.

Those convicted face fines of up to \$10,000 or jail sentences up to six months, or both, for the first offence. Penalties double for the second or subsequent offence.

However health and social workers believe the number of people caught vaping does not reflect the true scale of the problem here.

Ms Lena Teo, deputy director of therapy and mental wellness services at Care Singapore, which helps youths at risk, said: "Vaping is popular among youth as they think it is cool and odourless. There are so many different flavours (of the vape juice) and you can create smoke circles."

Dr Tan Kok Kuan of Dr Tan & Partners says that some smokers vape as a substitute for smoking cigarettes – as they believe that vaping is less harmful than smoking.

He said: "It is now accepted by most national and international health authorities that e-cigarettes expose the user to much fewer toxins compared to cigarettes."

However, he stressed that the

vape juice used in e-cigarettes contains nicotine, which is highly addictive when it is inhaled, and other harmful chemicals.

Singapore's move to outlaw vaping has had some effect in curbing the habit, counsellors and vapors interviewed say, due to difficulty in obtaining the vape juice and the fear of being caught.

Many users bought their vaping products from Johor Baru in Malaysia or online.

Adam (not his real name), a 34-year-old IT professional, stopped vaping last year for fear of being caught. He said: "We had to sneak the (vape) juices in from Johor Baru but it became too much of a hassle. And you can't smoke it openly as you don't know who is watching you. So I have become a bit paranoid."

A 32-year-old businessman who only wanted to be known as Mr Tan was fined \$5,000 for importing e-cigarettes from the United States a

few years ago but has not given up the habit.

He says vaping is much cheaper than his \$1,000-a-month cigarette habit and buys bottles of vape juice from Johor Baru that costs less than \$17 a bottle and lasts him a month each.

"I vape once in a while at home for the shiokness of it," he said. "The ban does not really deter me and I have not seen anyone die from vaping yet."

Among those caught breaking the law was Mohammed Fauzan Sarip, 41, who was found with six sets of e-vaporisers at Woodlands Checkpoints by Immigration and Checkpoints Authority officers. He bought them in Johor Baru and tried to smuggle them into Singapore, claiming it was for his own use. He was fined \$2,000 last October.

In Singapore, the Health Ministry considers e-vaporisers as gateway products that will get users hooked on nicotine.

Last November, the United States' Food and Drug Administration imposed sharp restrictions on where flavoured e-cigarettes can be sold, to curb their use among teenagers, which it said had reached "epidemic" levels.

However United Kingdom government agency Public Health England said that e-cigarettes are 95 per cent less harmful than tobacco and encourages smokers to quit cigarettes by switching to e-cigarettes.

The HSA spokesman advised the public not to buy e-vaporisers, either from the Internet or from overseas. They should also discard those in their possession.

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E-cig sellers smoked out

To boost sales of e-cigarettes on his website, Mr Boo Yee Fong, who is in his 30s, held a lucky draw – the more people spent, the more chances they had to win.

He bought his supplies from vendors overseas and made a profit of about \$12,000 before he was busted by the Health Sciences Authority (HSA). The HSA also shut down his website.

Mr Boo, one of 245 e-vaporiser peddlers caught by the HSA in the past five years, was fined the largest amount handed out to an e-cigarette peddler so far. He was fined \$64,500 in 2014.

Another person caught was Mr Kerry Tan, who used "vapekitty" as his Instagram handle.

The 25-year-old worked in sales but had a sideline selling e-vaporisers illegally online for between \$140 and \$280 each, as well as related items.

He made between \$3,000 and \$4,000 in profit over about two years before he was caught. He was fined \$21,000 last November.

Another man caught was Mr Samuel Lye, 58.

Mr Lye, who runs a bowling shop, was vaping at his store when a client asked him to buy e-cigarettes.

He imported his wares from e-commerce website Alibaba, and sold the client 12 sets of e-cigarettes for \$640.

Despite being investigated by the HSA, he continued to import more e-cigarettes and was fined \$5,500 in October last year.

Theresa Tan

Mr Boo Yee Fong, one of 245 e-vaporiser peddlers caught by the HSA in the past five years, was fined the largest amount handed out to an e-cigarette peddler so far. He was fined \$64,500 in 2014.

Some hope more can be done to increase footfall

FROM B1

to date, all five operators have issued every stallholder with either a letter or an amended agreement with the revised contract terms.

"All stallholders of the seven hawkers centres have also acknowledged receipt of these agreements. From the feedback we have received so far, these changes have been welcomed by the stallholders at the seven new hawkers centres," said the NEA spokesman.

Key tweaks to the SEHC contracts that kicked in on Jan 1 included clauses related to stall operating days and hours, termination notice periods and security deposits, capping of liquidated damages that can be charged to stallholders for breaches, and waiving of legal fees related to the tenancy.

After the new contractual terms kicked in on Jan 1, The Straits Times visited four SEHCs: Ci Yuan Community Centre Hawker Centre in Hougang, run by Fei Siong's social enterprise arm; Jurong West Hawker Centre, which is run by Hawker Management, owned by Koufu; Our Tampines Hub SEHC, operated by OTMH by Kopitiam; and Yishun Park Hawker Centre, by the Timbre Group.

Hawkers at the SEHCs were mostly pleased with the tweaks, and told ST they were relieved to have more flexibility, and were able to carry out their business without fear that more charges would soon be imposed.

"I still work six days a week, 14 hours a day, but I feel better that I have the option not to if I need a break," said Mr H.K. Wee, in his 40s, a hawker at a noodle stall in Ci Yuan SEHC.

Other hawkers said that they were glad not to be locked in by their contracts for several months in case they wanted to stop working at the SEHC.

Mr John Lee, in his late 20s, who helps his parents – both in their late 50s – at their stall at Our Tampines Hub SEHC, said: "My parents are ageing, and we don't know how long more we will be opening a stall here."

"Now we have more flexibility to quit the hawker business if working long hours at the hawker centre is no longer an option."

Mr Mohammed Norman Mubarak Ahmad, 40, who owns a nasi lemak stall at Yishun Park SEHC, said: "No matter how you look at it, the contracts do not favour the hawkers as much, compared to when NEA was handling the hawker centre."

"While the NEA has said it would keep the cost for SEHCs down, it hasn't really happened. All organi-

sations need to profit somehow, but they should not go overboard."

Hawkers at all the SEHCs that ST spoke to said there was still room for improvement, particularly in terms of increasing footfall.

Mr Ng Thian Wee, 38, who runs a chicken rice stall at Yishun Park, said: "The crowd here is good at times and bad at others, and the volume of visitors changes often."

He added that the effects of marketing efforts at his SEHC were temporary, and suggested that more efforts to increase footfall would keep Yishun Park vibrant – even during off-peak hours.

Although hawkers are mostly pleased with their terms now, the NEA's work is not done yet.

The NEA spokesman said the agency would continue to make adjustments and recalibrate the management model to ensure that it continues to achieve the key social outcomes of SEHCs: to provide affordable food in a clean environment, and allow hawkers to make a decent living.

He added that the operators have been asked to form groups to get feedback from hawkers, and the NEA's Place Managers have been checking in on hawkers at their stalls to see how they are faring and if they have any complaints.

The agency's officials, the spokesman said, have also been present at all meetings between the SEHC operators and their hawkers.

He said: "Less than 4 per cent of stallholders at the SEHCs have expressed that they might choose to exit the hawker business, and these stallholders have cited reasons such as poor health or preference to make a career switch."

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Singapore Airlines said it is currently working with its security vendor to have the phishing site, which was offering free tickets while asking for personal data, taken down.

PHOTO: ST READER

Today

■ **Messages to this chat and calls are now secured with end-to-end encryption. Tap for more info.**

Singapore Airlines is giving away Free tickets to celebrate its 70th Anniversary. Get your free tickets at: <http://www.singaporeair.com-ticketsfree.win>

1:54 PM

SIA warns of phishing scam promising free plane tickets

Free Singapore Airlines (SIA) tickets by clicking on a link?

Probably too good to be true.

SIA warned customers in a Facebook post yesterday that a website masquerading as its own was offering free tickets while asking for personal data.

"We... would like to advise customers to exercise discretion when revealing personal data to unverified sources," SIA said in its post.

In a screenshot circulating on social media, a WhatsApp message

reads: "Singapore Airlines is giving away Free tickets to celebrate its 70th Anniversary. Get your free tickets at: <http://www.singaporeair.com-ticketsfree.win>"

members of the public who wish to verify if a website, e-mail or call is legitimately linked to SIA can contact it through its social media channels or at www.singaporeair.com/en_UK/feedback-enquiry/

This is the latest of many scams that have dogged the national carrier. Last June, a fake website had sought to mislead users into thinking SIA was offering tickets at only \$1 to celebrate its 45th anniversary.

In March the same year, SIA similarly warned its customers of scams being circulated through e-mail and phone calls.

Apart from SIA, The Straits Times reported on Saturday that scammers were impersonating the Singapore Police Force, with fake websites to phish for personal details.

More information on scams can be found at www.scamalert.sg

Tee Zhuo



A worker weighing fish at the Jurong Fishery Port. Supermarket chain NTUC FairPrice says that the varieties of fish that are more popular during Chinese New Year, like red grouper, snapper, threadfin and pomfret, cost 10 to 15 per cent more now compared with last month.
ST FILE PHOTO

Spike in fish prices likely to continue in run-up to CNY

Bad weather, rising demand, Malaysia's seafood export ban cited as reasons for higher prices of popular fishes

Rei Kurohi

A recent spike in the price of fish that is likely to continue with Chinese New Year just weeks away was partly the result of recent bad weather, which caused some shortages among Singapore's regular suppliers, fish sellers told The Straits Times.

Mr Lim Choon Yau, who represents wholesaler Song Fish Dealer, said fishermen in countries like In-

donesia and Thailand have reported poor catches and unpredictable weather preventing them from fishing in recent weeks.

He said: "The price of Chinese pomfret has risen from about \$30 to as much as \$50 per kg. If the weather continues to be bad, who knows how high the price could rise?"

Mr Tay Peng Kiat, owner of Chip Hong (Pin Sin) Fishery, said stocks of other popular fishes like red grouper and threadfin have also

been affected, and buyers can expect to be paying even more in the coming weeks.

Later last month, a tsunami in Indonesia's Sunda Strait killed hundreds of people and destroyed fishing boats. Last week, Tropical storm Pabuk caused floods in southern Thailand and killed at least one fisherman in Koh Samui.

Also contributing to the price increase is a bump in demand throughout the region. Because of higher domestic demand, the Malaysian authorities last month banned exports of seafood such as kembong (Indian mackerel), pelalang (short-bodied mackerel), selar (horse mackerel), salayang (sar-

dines), bawal putih (silver pomfret), shrimp and prawn, until Feb 28.

Supermarket chain NTUC FairPrice said varieties of fish that are more popular during Chinese New Year, like red grouper, snapper, threadfin and pomfret, cost 10 to 15 per cent more now compared with last month.

A spokesman said: "Prices of popular products typically increase leading up to the festive period, as they are affected by market demand and external weather conditions."

FairPrice noted that prices of other food items like poultry and vegetables have remained stable.

PRICES CLIMBING

The price of Chinese pomfret has risen from about \$30 to as much as \$50 per kg. If the weather continues to be bad, who knows how high the price could rise?

“

MR LIM CHOON YAU, who represents wholesaler Song Fish Dealer. He said fishermen in countries like Indonesia and Thailand have reported poor catches and unpredictable weather preventing them from fishing in recent weeks.

Fishmonger Jeffrey Tan, who runs DishTheFish outlets at West Coast Plaza and Boe Crescent Market with his wife Angeline Ong, said on Friday that prices have risen about 35 per cent over what they were two weeks ago and are changing daily.

On Friday, Chinese pomfret at DishTheFish, sourced from Indonesia, was being sold for \$38 to \$45 a kilogram, depending on the size of the fish.

Indonesia is Singapore's largest supplier of fish, providing 23 per cent of all fish imports to the Republic in 2017, according to the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority.

Red grouper at DishTheFish was going for \$40 to \$50 per kg.

Rabbitfish was being sold for around \$15 to \$25 per kg, but Mr Tan said he expected the price to double or triple in the two weeks leading up to Chinese New Year, which coincide with the fish's spawning season.

For a few days a year close to Chinese New Year, rabbitfish carry creamy roe or milt – the eggs and sperm of the fish – that are believed to bring good fortune.

Mr Tan said: "Two years ago, rabbitfish roe and milt hit \$150 per kg on the first day of Chinese New Year."

Higher prices do not deter shoppers like Madam Catherine Chua, who often hosts reunion dinner for her extended family, and is used to paying more for fish during the Chinese New Year, she said.

The 70-year-old business owner said she plans to buy Chinese pomfret as usual despite the price.

"You know the Chinese saying, *nian nian you yu*," said Madam Chua, referring to a greeting that means "to have abundance each year". The Chinese word for abundance sounds like the word for fish.

"Reunion dinner is just once a year. Having fish is simply a must," she said.

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HOME IN FOCUS



Red-eared slider terrapins clamouring over one another after they were transferred from a pond into a fibreglass container, before they were transported to their new enclosure at Orto in Yishun last Tuesday. About 500 residents of The Live Turtle and Tortoise Museum were moved from their Chinese Garden abode of more than 15 years to their new home last week.



The great tortoise migration

The Live Turtle and Tortoise Museum moved to its new home in Yishun last Tuesday



Benson Ang
Lifestyle Correspondent

Some ducked into their shells. Others flailed their limbs wildly. And then there were those who kept calm and got ready to move on, slowly.

Last Tuesday, about 500 residents of The Live Turtle and Tortoise Museum left their Chinese Garden abode of more than 15 years and moved to a new home.

Turtles, tortoises and terrapins of more than 40 species started a new chapter of their lives last week at leisure park Orto in Yishun. The oldest among them is believed to be more than 80 years old.

Over several trips, four trucks carefully moved the sensitive, slow-moving creatures. Among them were radiated tortoises from Madagascar, alligator snapping turtles from North America and soft-shell turtles from India.

On the museum's last day at the Chinese Garden site on Jan 6, staff and volunteers got the turtles ready for the big move from 4pm. They started cleaning the turtles' shells with soft brushes, and their limbs with cloth, before packing them into boxes and baskets.

More sensitive species, such as the pig-nosed turtle, were packed individually into styrofoam boxes to minimise any impact during the journey.

Hardier species, such as red-eared slider terrapins, were placed together in large, bright blue fibreglass tanks, and moved in batches

of 50. And some turtles were placed in baskets.

Ms Connie Tan, 48, the museum's owner, says: "Some of them want to know what is happening. Putting them in baskets lets them know they are being moved."

When handling some species, such as the alligator snapping turtles, which bite, extra care must be taken.

Volunteer Christ Lim, 43, wore rubber gloves when moving the creatures. He says: "When you hold a turtle, it will open its mouth if it feels threatened. But today, most of the turtles are calm, probably because we have been handling them over the last few days to prepare them for the move."

By 2pm last Tuesday, most of the reptiles had reached their new home in the backyard of their Jurong West abode.

The new museum, expected to have a soft opening by the end of the month, is about 10 per cent larger than the Chinese Garden location.

The new enclosures, which are bigger, are already complete. About 80 per cent of the overall renovations – estimated to cost almost \$600,000 – which include the setting-up of tanks, a filtration system, as well as security are also complete.

Various contractors have helped with sponsorships and discounts, but Ms Tan still has to fork out around \$200,000 for the renovations, which she is paying through instalments.

Her wish? That more people visit the new attraction.

At the new location, Singapore residents will pay \$10 and foreign-

ers \$14 for adults for entry. For children, locals pay \$6 and foreigners \$10.

There are plans for the new attraction to feature QR codes which visitors can scan to see more information on the animals. Guests can also book tours and buy tickets online.

The attraction was opened in 2001 by Ms Tan and her late father, Mr Danny Tan, director of an event logistics and management company. He died in 2015.

Some of these shelled animals have been the Tans' family pets from 1976, before Singapore joined an international convention in 1986 to ban the import and export of endangered species. Others were abandoned by collectors.

Ms Tan, creative director in her late father's company, has been around turtles since she was six. She estimates that her family has spent more than \$2 million to care for the turtles, which are not for sale. The married mother of two says: "It is a lot of money. But it has been worth it because they are my beloved pets."

"There are times when my family thought of shutting the museum down. But I will always try to keep it open because I want the public to see these beautiful creatures."

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Turtles move house



SCAN TO WATCH
ST
<http://str.sg/turtle>



Volunteers forming a human chain to transfer red-eared slider terrapins and Malayan box terrapins into a fibreglass tank, as the pond at the Chinese Garden site would be drained, in preparation for the move.

Far left: Some of the creatures, such as the elongated tortoise (top right), Indian flap-shell turtle (bottom left) and soft-shell turtle (bottom centre), waiting to be transported to their new home.

Left: Ms Connie Tan releasing a red-footed tortoise (left) and a yellow-footed tortoise into their new enclosure at Orto.



Workers transferring the red-eared slider terrapins carefully into a big fibreglass tank at the back of a truck after stern instructions from museum owner Connie Tan – "Don't throw the turtles, ah" – before the truck left the Chinese Garden for the Orto site.

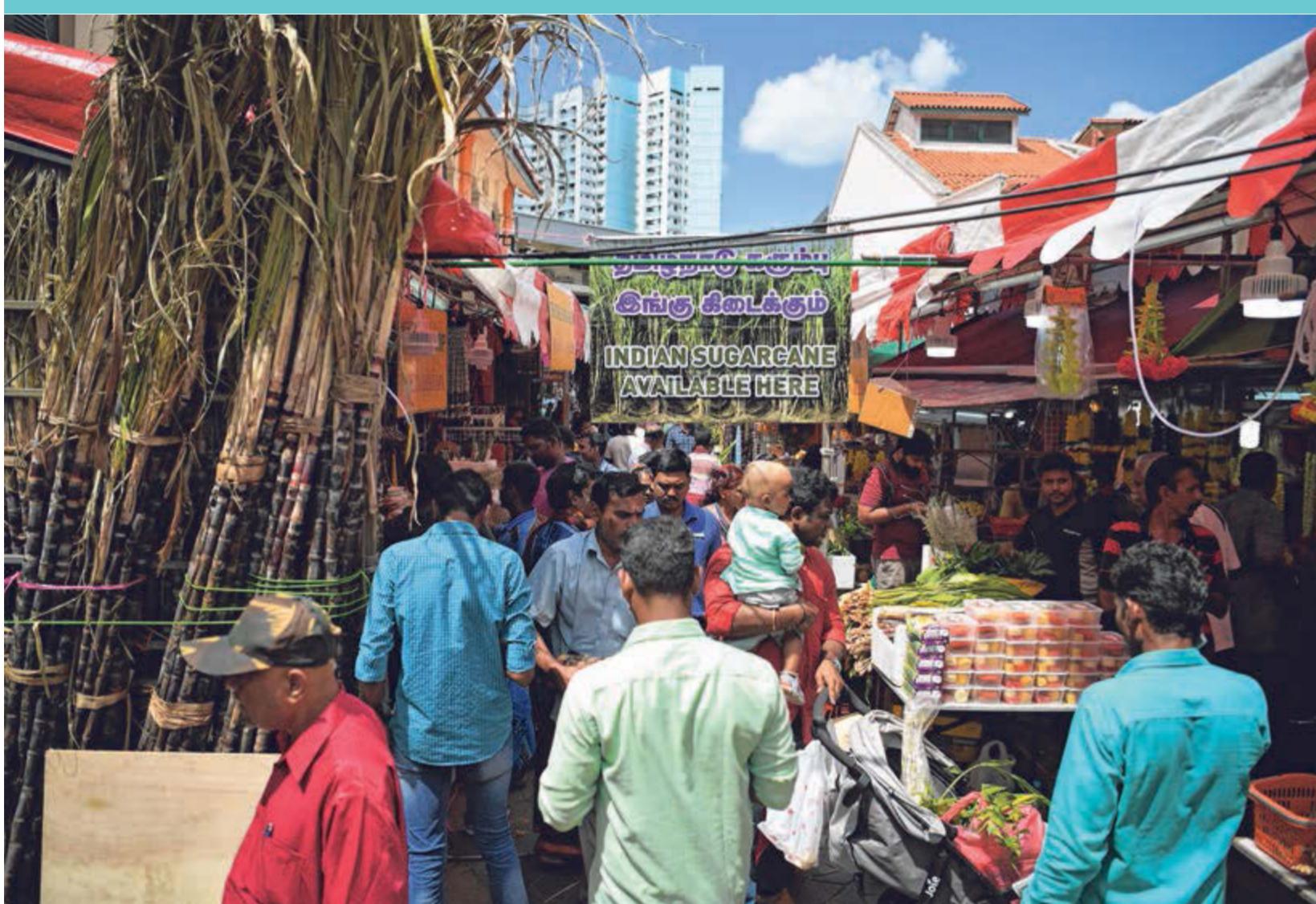


Workers engaged for the move waving to the truck carrying red-eared slider terrapins and Malayan box terrapins as it left the Chinese Garden site for the Orto site. By 2pm last Tuesday, most of the reptiles had reached their new home at Orto. The new museum is expected to have a soft opening by the end of the month.



Workers preparing the turtles' new enclosure before their arrival at their home in Orto. The enclosure will be fitted with new sculptures in the shapes of turtles and tortoises, among others. The new museum is about 10 per cent larger than the Chinese Garden location.

Pongal festivities add buzz to Little India



ST PHOTOS: KUA CHEE SIONG

People thronged the streets of Little India yesterday for some last-minute shopping to prepare for the annual Pongal festival, traditionally celebrated by farmers in India to give thanks for a year of bountiful harvest.

The festival is celebrated for three days in Singapore from tomorrow to Thursday, but the festivities and activities related to Pongal will go on till Feb 10.

Tamils who celebrate it shop for items such as sugar cane, vegetables and fruits which are important components of the festival.

This year's Pongal festival is also the first time that animals are paraded on the roads. On Thursday, a bull, three cows, two calves and two goats were dressed up with bells and garlands and led through Campbell Lane to a shed in Hastings Road. The animals will be housed there temporarily for a heritage carnival until Saturday.

More than 800,000 people are expected to descend on Little India during this period. Highlights of this year's festival include a Little India Food Trail, workshops and a series of activities and street decorations.

Sue-Ann Tan

Youth push for hawker culture to get Unesco listing

Several go all out with travelling exhibition to get public support for nomination

Rei Kurohi

As Singapore prepares to nominate its hawker culture for inscription into Unesco's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, some young Singaporeans have stepped up to lend their support to the bid.

One of them is Miss Poh Huan Rong, 19, a third-year business and social enterprise student from Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

She was in Shanghai for six months on an internship last March and while there, found herself craving her favourite char kway teow.

After three months, she finally found a restaurant serving the dish – but it was too salty and the noodles "didn't taste right".

She said: "I even tried cooking it myself, but they don't sell the right kind of noodles or sauce there."

"Only when I came back to Singapore could I have a proper plate of char kway teow."

The restaurant environment was also a far cry from the casual familiarity of the Clementi hawker centre where she often had supper with friends after their co-curricular activities, she said.

This experience made her realise the importance of not taking Singapore's hawker culture for granted.

When she returned, she signed up as a volunteer for the Our SG Hawker Culture travelling exhibition.



Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu having a local breakfast with (from left) Temasek Polytechnic students Vivian Zhu and Keisia Lim-Urquhart, Ngee Ann Polytechnic student Poh Huan Rong and Ngee Ann Polytechnic lecturer Pauline Ooi at Yuhua Village Market and Food Centre in Jurong East. They also gave out pamphlets (below) encouraging people to pledge their support to uphold Singapore's hawker culture by scanning a QR code. ST PHOTOS: JASMINE CHOONG



tion to showcase hawker culture and encourage members of the public to pledge their support for the nomination. The exhibition features a miniature hawker centre diorama and colourful information boards. Since its launch in October

last year, it has garnered more than 220,000 pledges online and at various venues around the island.

Passers-by can hit a button on the exhibition to signal their support without penning a full pledge.

Yesterday, Miss Poh was at Yuhua

Village Market and Food Centre in Jurong East, where the exhibition ends today, with first-year culinary and catering management students Keisia Lim-Urquhart and Vivian Zhu from Temasek Polytechnic.

They had breakfast and chatted with Culture, Community and Youth Minister Grace Fu, who was there to pen her own support. Ms Fu wrote that she supports the nomination because hawker culture "is an important part of our lives".

Miss Lim-Urquhart, 17, and Miss Zhu, 18, both researched hawker food as part of a project on local breakfast foods. The former said she chose to study mee siam as it is a part of her Nonya heritage. Her mother is part Peranakan and her father is a Scottish Canadian.

She said: "The many variations of dishes like mee siam show the diversity in Singapore. Malay hawkers don't add coconut milk to the gravy. And with nasi lemak, Chinese hawkers introduced luncheon meat."

Miss Zhu said she learnt from a hawker how nasi lemak was created by Malay settlers living by the sea who used coconut as an ingredient because it was abundant.

She said: "With better understanding, you also learn to appreciate it more. Hawker food is more expensive now, but is still affordable."

"Paying more is a way to keep the culture sustainable because rentals and ingredients are also more expensive."

The Our SG Hawker Culture exhibitions will continue to collect pledges from the public until March, when the nomination will be submitted to Unesco.

The exhibition will move on to Toa Payoh Hub Atrium and Velocity Mall from tomorrow to Sunday.

Details about upcoming locations can be found on the Our SG Heritage website at www.oursgheritage.sg/support-hawker-culture/

rei@sph.com.sg

APPRECIATION FOR HERITAGE

The many variations of dishes like mee siam show the diversity in Singapore. Malay hawkers don't add coconut milk to the gravy. And with nasi lemak, Chinese hawkers introduced luncheon meat.



MISS KEISIA LIM-URQUHART, a first-year culinary and catering management student at Temasek Polytechnic who researched hawker food.

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ORGANISED BY:
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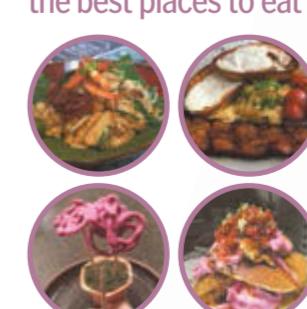
* The University of Melbourne is ranked no.1 in Australia and no. 32 worldwide by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019.

Are you between the ages of 14 - 17 years of age? Find out more about the Trinity College Young Leaders short program happening in December. www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au/tcfs

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From hipster to hawker, the best places to eat out



The best ingredients
✓ tnp.sg/lifestyle



IT'S A THE NEW MARKET DEAL



Eye-catching and attractive packaging that will surely turn heads. PHOTOS: YEO'S, NEW MOON

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E-mail feedback to
sweetinfo@besweet.sg



Eye-catching and attractive packaging that will surely turn heads. PHOTOS: YEO'S, NEW MOON

New year, new look

No better time to show it off – check out these homegrown brands and their exciting makeovers

For some, 2019 means a fresh start. For others, it means marking a milestone. Whatever it personally means to you, the new year is often a good time to unveil an updated look, especially for local household brands that have grown with Singaporeans and their families over the years.

Vibrant and trendy

Well-loved brand Yeo's is known for providing refreshing and delicious Asian drinks at every festive and non-festive occasion, at every kopitiam and home.

Ardent fans of this homegrown brand have another reason to celebrate as their favourite drinks are now proudly decked out in trendy new packaging, yet retaining all of the same great taste.

Stock up on Yeo's lower sugar Winter Melon Drink with winter melon juice and freshly-brewed Chrysanthemum Tea using hang-baju flowers. Also enjoy Yeo's Grass Jelly Drink with addictive chewy bits that has no added flavoring and Soy Bean Milk freshly extracted with whole soybeans that provides a source of protein.

This new year, Yeo's drinks will not only delight your tastebuds, but also capture your attention with its vibrant new design.

Timeless elegance

A familiar face at family feasts, the consistent quality and delicious

taste of New Moon's products are of gold standard.

This year, New Moon celebrates 60 years of excellence.

To commemorate this special occasion, it has launched an elegant new packaging, aptly named Timeless.

Not only is the design beautiful — a soft champagne gold accented by the signature coral print that evokes modern sophistication — but its name is also a nod to the renewable element in its packaging.

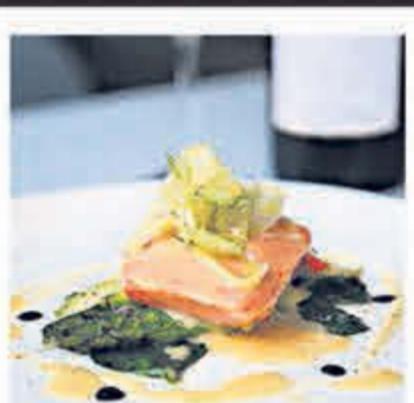
The external box and lush velvet red interior can be reused and recycled by the receiver.

Whether used as a jewellery box, a case for watches, or a mini treasure chest for prized ornaments, it is the perfect storage solution for your home or office.



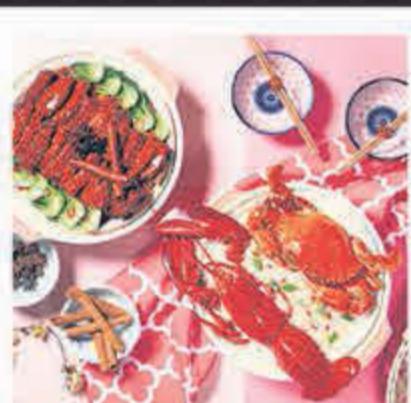
Educational journey

Discover the educational pathway that best suits your child at the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) Journeying Beyond Poly & 'A's event on Jan 15 and 16, noon to 8pm; or the Journeying Beyond 'O's event on Jan 19. Learn more about SIM's diverse programmes and how students can cultivate their interests and passions with over 70 different clubs and councils. Register at singe.edu.sg.



Delightful dishes

A new face in the dining scene is modern European restaurant COSMO Restaurant & Wine Bar, helmed by renowned chef-instructor and personal chef Michele Ow. The establishment offers dishes made with premium ingredients and a stellar line-up of over 70 wines. Until Jan 31, ST readers can enjoy a one-for-one deal of a signature soup or salad, any main and dessert of the day. Open from 11.30am to 9.30pm.



Tasty takeaways

From Jan 21 to Feb 19, treat your guests to delicious homemade takeaway from the Lunar New Year Shoppe at Carlton City Hotel Singapore. Chinese delicacies and goodies include the fragrant and savoury Yam and Pork Belly Fortune Pot with fermented bean curd sauce, and the rich and flavourful Lobster and Crab Cheese Bee Hoon Abundance Pot. Call 6632-8921, e-mail f&b@carltoncity.sg or visit carltoncity.sg for more information.

TOP PICKS



Prosperity sets

Usher in the Chinese New Year with Eu Yan Sang's bountiful abalone specials from all over the world, with gift sets of varying sizes from Double Joy sets starting at \$48 to Auspicious Hampers from \$98. With a minimum of \$128 spent, collect a free limited-edition Infinite Prosperity Gift Set, worth \$12.90 each, in eight unique designs.



6745-0321 to register your interest.
Location: 178 Paya Lebar Road #06-08 Singapore 409030
Time: 1.30pm-4pm

Healthier you

Only on Jan 19 and 26, health supplement company Q&N will be holding a forum featuring health talks, sharing sessions as well as major discounts on all Q&N products not to be missed. Light refreshments and gifts will be provided. Call

788-630 to register your interest. Seats are limited.

Location: 178 Paya Lebar Road #06-08 Singapore 409030

Time: 1.30pm-4pm

Bountiful rewards

Till Feb 10, spend a minimum of \$38 to redeem a limited-edition six-piece Ang Bao Pack, and \$168 to redeem an adorable bowl-and-cup set. Also stand a chance to win attractive prizes every week when you guess the correct combination of numbers on the dolls at Level 2 Atrium. Refer to compassone.sg/reunion-revelry for more details.



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1pm to 4pm (first 500 visitors)

Meet & Greet with MasterChef Singapore Finalists

3pm to 4.30pm (first 500 visitors)

Meet the masters

Meet and greet the

MasterChef Singapore

Finalists at Compass One

(Jan 19), Plaza Singapura

(Jan 20) and Causeway

Point (Jan 26). Sample

specially crafted Chinese

New Year recipes from

3pm to 4.30pm, and take home the recipes after the cooking

demonstrations to add to your culinary repertoire. Visit

facebook.com/sg.coldstorage for more details.

Meet the masters

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(Jan 19), Plaza Singapura

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facebook.com/sg.coldstorage for more details.

Poly route tips

Want to find out more

about the post-secondary

options for your child? Join

the Republic Polytechnic's

(RP's) Parents' Talk on

Jan 15 to gain valuable

tips on applying to a

Polytechnic through the

Joint Admissions Exercise,

and learn more about RP's

full-time courses. Visit [www.rp.edu.sg/jae/parents-talk](http://rp.edu.sg/jae/parents-talk) to register or find out more.

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Sacred treasures
The Straits Times,
Bon Voyage, Jan 15



Beyond O Levels
The Straits Times and
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FORUM

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Don't force consumers to buy plan that doesn't cater to them

CareShield Life, a new compulsory government-run scheme which will be implemented from 2020 for everyone between the ages of 30 and 40, is intended to replace the optional ElderShield scheme (Govt to run ElderShield scheme from 2021; Jan 8).

While the objectives of the plans are noble, it is important that the public is given actuarial studies showing the claims experience and the probability of claims in Singapore for those between the ages of 30 and 40 for such

long-term care needs so as to justify starting the plan from that age and warrant it being mandatory.

With the Government taking over these long-term care plans, consumers are tied to a one-size-fits-all plan.

In the event of a dispute of claim, there is no impartial body for the consumers to seek resolution from, unlike in the insurance industry.

Also, the personnel, training and system resources of the current participating insurance companies will be wasted and made redundant

after the takeover. Restructuring would be unavoidable, potentially causing loss of employment to many.

CareShield Life should be open to the insurance industry, which has the expertise, resources and systems to administer the plan.

A schedule of benefits to provide a minimum set of requirements could be mandated and the private insurers could be given the flexibility to include additional benefits according to the needs of the various groups of consumers as

Take research conclusions with pinch of salt

In this day and age, one must constantly be sceptical about the conclusions derived from scientific research (Study links green tea with increased risk of Type 2 diabetes; Jan 8).

With enough financial incentives or other ulterior motivations, scientific research can be skewed to prove just about anything.

One also needs to understand that dietary research is notoriously difficult to conduct, with comparable double-blind studies being almost impossible to achieve due to being clouded by ancillary factors.

Given that people in China traditionally drank green tea and had low rates of diabetes, it seems to go against epidemiological and cultural observations to conclude that the consumption of green tea

is linked to an increased risk of diabetes. It was only with the adoption of a Western diet rich in sugar, dairy and meat, combined with the Asian staple of rice, that the diabetes rate shot up exponentially among Asians.

Surely this link is more intuitive than the one between diabetes and green tea?

And if dietary research is already so fraught with complications, what more retrospective studies of in-utero nutrition (Why some people are born to have a beer belly; Jan 8)?

Is there really a need to invoke the spectre of in-utero malnutrition just to absolve beer drinkers of the sin of excessive calorie consumption in the form of alcohol?

Yik Keng Yeong (Dr)

Firms must take lead in going green to create impact

There are regular Forum letters with good suggestions by writers on how the use of plastic bags, plastic straws and others can be cut down (Saving Earth goes beyond straw bans, by Ms Natasha Bipin Doshi, Dec 24, 2018; and Adopt 'shock therapy' to tackle plastic problem, by Mr Sean Lim Wei Xin, Jan 3).

However, I would personally be more encouraged to reduce, reuse and recycle if I saw big companies setting a good example at their corporate events too.

I have noticed that plastic water bottles are always handed out at corporate events. Isn't there an alternative to this?

At corporate meetings, companies can easily offer jugs of water and glasses at the board table instead of plastic bottles.

Also, soft drink and bottled-water manufacturers should seek alternative bottling methods.

As individuals, we can only avoid buying these, but the impact of our actions is small. Alternative bottling methods will create a far bigger impact.

Also, a complete ban on plastic bags is not a viable option as a majority of the population lives in high-rise buildings and many Housing Board blocks do not have adequate food-disposal methods. People need to bag their rubbish so as not to attract insects and rodents.

Rena Ong (Mrs)

FORUM ONLINE

SINGTEL: Customer's contract error corrected by Singtel.

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THE STRAITS TIMES SINGAPOREAN OF THE YEAR 2018

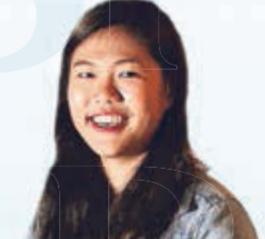
PRESENTED BY **UBS**

Who among these 11 finalists is your choice for The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year 2018 award?

This award, in partnership with UBS for the fourth year running, seeks to honour the positive impact made by Singaporeans and celebrate the triumph of the human spirit. Each of these nominees has a powerful story that will resonate with, and inspire, all of us. Read more about them at str.sg/soty2018 and tell us who should be the winner by Jan 15, 6pm.

Cast your vote now at
str.sg/soty18vote

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Harbhajan Singh
The veteran nurse led a team of more than 100 nurses in the 2003 fight against Sars, the severe acute respiratory syndrome. Today, at the age of 78, Harbhajan Singh continues to work at the very hospital he first joined as a young man aged 25.

Annabelle Kwok
At 26, NeuralBay founder Annabelle Kwok has already made her mark in artificial intelligence. She also wears many other hats as mathematician, hardware hacker, sportswoman, arts performer and do-gooder.

Teo Yee Ming
Hai Sing Catholic School teacher Teo Yee Ming has led the school's robotics team from obscurity to success on the world stage. The school team has won the world's most prestigious robotics competition four times.

Elizabeth Tan
Entrepreneur Elizabeth Tan grew her father's shoe shop into a global chain with 50 stores. She is also a humanitarian who set up Sight To Sky, a charity which organises annual mobile eye clinics in India, Pakistan and Nepal.

Bjorn Low
From a small social enterprise, Bjorn Low's Edible Garden City is now a thriving business. It designs and builds food gardens, supplies greens to restaurants, and trains and employs people from vulnerable or marginalised segments.

Kenneth and Adeline Thong
The Thongs not only open their house to young people without a roof over their heads to live in for free, but they also recreate a home within a house for them. Both left their jobs to be present in the lives of young people.



Nizar Mohamed Shariff and Free Food For All
In 2014, Nizar Mohamed Shariff set up Free Food For All, a charity that provides free cooked meals for the needy. The charity cooks up to 10,000 meals a year for 3,000 elderly or low-income residents living in rental flats.

Douglas Yeo and Poh Kok Wee
Veteran diver Douglas Yeo, 50, risked his life to help with the evacuation of the last five Thai boys who were trapped in a cave. Age also did not deter Poh Kok Wee, 57, from helping scout for alternative cave entrances to reach the boys.

Teo You Yenn
Sociology researcher Teo You Yenn published a book of essays on the lives of people who live in HDB rental flats. This Is What Inequality Looks Like is a bestseller that has sparked a national conversation on socio-economic inequality in Singapore.

Robert Chew
Robert Chew, 69, has donated blood a total of 184 times. He started when he was 18 years old and donates blood three to four times a year. He has drained his body of blood 18 times over his lifetime as a donor.

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Don't shut out voices of those with autism

It worries me greatly that for all that is being done to educate and raise people's awareness about autism spectrum disorders (ASD), true understanding and acceptance are still a distant dream for individuals like me, who are on the spectrum.

Many policymaking decisions towards people with ASD or other developmental disabilities are made by people who have little to no understanding about the problems we face on a daily basis.

Some instances of these are not giving any consideration to how social interaction makes many of

us extremely uncomfortable or forcing people like us into jobs that just do not suit our capabilities.

The prevalent attitude appears to be: "I'm normal, you're not, so I'm smarter than you. Therefore, I'll decide what I think is best for you".

Actually, the first step towards a solution is extremely easy.

Simply allow us to tell you what we need to achieve our aspirations – to be taxpayers, not tax burdens.

Some simple ways to do this are by inviting people with ASD to conferences, dialogues or talks and allowing us to share our

experiences, difficulties and what can be done to help us become contributing members of society.

One such event where this could be done is at the Asia-Pacific Autism Conference 2019.

However, it is discouraging when a presenter with autism has to pay a prohibitive registration fee of \$642 at such an event.

While having greater awareness of autism is good, it is not enough.

For those of us with ASD to not become a burden on taxpayers and to give back ourselves, we need the right support and help.

Christopher Loy Ki-Jin

Why are FAS, Fandi keeping mum on 'unique ecosystem' comment?

About a month ago, I wrote to seek clarification on Fandi Ahmad's comment about our unique local football ecosystem (Clarity on local football ecosystem' needed; Dec 12, 2018).

Shortly after, another Forum writer, Mr George Pasqual, also inquired on the same subject (Fandi really should explain his

cryptic comment; Dec 15, 2018). However, the Football Association of Singapore and Fandi have not clarified the comment.

It is strange that it has been publicly reported that "the new national coach must understand and adapt to our unique

ecosystem", but there has been no

effort made to define and elaborate what this ecosystem entails.

This seems to be a perceived stumbling block to the process of building a successful national football team.

Surely the football following here is entitled to an explanation in a public domain.

Yeo Hock Yew

Open electricity market gives consumers choice

We thank Mr Hoe Lye Soon for his letter on the Open Electricity Market (OEM) (Keep buying of electricity simple; Jan 5).

The OEM aims to give consumers more choices when buying electricity.

Consumers who prefer to buy electricity from SP Group at the regulated tariff can continue to do so as it is not compulsory to switch and there is no deadline for switching.

Regardless of their choice, consumers will continue to enjoy the same reliable electricity supply.

There is strong competition in

the Open Electricity Market. Electricity retailers have to minimise costs and offer competitive price plans.

Consumers who have switched pay an electricity rate which is on average about 20 per cent lower than the regulated tariff.

Those who wish to switch can start by comparing the standard price plans offered by the electricity retailers using the Price Comparison Tool available at compare.openelectricitymarket.sg.

When they are ready to sign up, they can do so online through the retailer's website.

The retailer will then work with

SP Group to effect the switch. Household consumers can also choose to use an advanced meter to monitor half-hourly electricity consumption data via a mobile application.

Retailers will be able to advise customers on this option.

The Energy Market Authority will continue to engage consumers to help them make informed electricity purchase decisions.

Dorcas Tan
Director
Market Development & Surveillance Department
Energy Market Authority

Household consumers can also choose to use an advanced meter to monitor half-hourly electricity consumption data via a mobile application.

Retailers will be able to advise customers on this option.

The Energy Market Authority will continue to engage consumers to help them make informed electricity purchase decisions.

Dorcas Tan
Director
Market Development & Surveillance Department
Energy Market Authority

VoicesOfYouth

Educate youth on diabetes

While government efforts on addressing diabetes have been commendable, more attention should be given to educating our youth on this health threat.

I have heard many complaints from students about the ban on the sale of medium- to high-sugar drinks in my school, and many of them often circumvent this rule by bringing their own unhealthy drinks. There is a lack of appreciation of the rationale behind the ban.

To counteract this problem, young people should be made to understand the seriousness of this through formal teaching or hands-on activities in school, or through educational talks by the Health Promotion Board or healthcare professionals.

In addition, World Diabetes Day could also be observed in schools.

Jarryl Tsai Hao Jun, 16
Secondary 4 student

No shame in repeating a year

There should be no shame in dropping out of the Integrated Programme or repeating a year in junior college (The shame of dropping out of the Integrated

Programme; Dec 30, 2018).

Just a couple of months ago, one of my teachers told my JC1 class that if we feel that we are not comfortable with the JC1 curriculum topics, we can choose to repeat a year to master the fundamental academic concepts, even if we meet the criteria for promotion to JC2.

She emphasised that life is a long journey, and that one additional year of education is insignificant compared with a person's lifespan and can be just what some of us need to lay a solid foundation for the future.

I found this to be very insightful.

All of us have different learning capabilities. We should do what is best for ourselves instead of succumbing to the pressures of our competitive society.

Lim Si En, 17
Junior college Year 2 student

CALLING YOUNG READERS: If you are a student or aged 21 years or below, and want to air your opinion on any report or letter in The Straits Times, e-mail your letter to stforum@sph.com.sg, with the subject header "Voices of Youth". Do include your age, school level and contact details, and the headline of the report/letter you refer to. Please keep to a length of 250 words.

Firms should implement smoke-free policies

Everyone should make a concerted effort to get involved in the campaign against smoking (Firmer steps in the anti-smoking fight; Jan 8).

Often, I have observed elderly patients puffing away at a cigarette just after their medical appointments at the neighbourhood polyclinics. As they are more prone to age-related conditions, such as hypertension, high cholesterol and diabetes, doctors should remind these patients of the ills of smoking.

Most of these seniors are under the notion that it is all right for them to smoke as long as they are on medication, but they do not realise that their condition will worsen if they indulge in this harmful habit.

Employers can also take a more positive stance towards the anti-smoking issue by way of adopting certain human resource criteria.

Take, for example, the case of two employees, one of whom smokes and the other does not, as they are being considered in a promotion exercise. Pragmatically, all things being equal, the promotion should preferably be given to the non-smoker as, simply put, an employee with smoking-related conditions may cause unnecessary disruption to the work schedule as he is more likely to fall sick.

Of course there will be anti-discrimination laws to deal with before this happens.

It is, thus, pivotal for companies to implement smoke-free policies and help employees to quit smoking for the simple reason that it is not just a health issue, but also a business issue.

Jeffrey Law Lee Beng

WRITE IN: Letters should be meant for exclusive publication in The Straits Times. They should be no longer than 400 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone numbers. The Forum editor reserves the right to edit the letters. For women, please indicate Miss, Ms, Mrs or Madam. Please e-mail your letter to stforum@sph.com.sg.

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NOTICES

Not Senoko Energy's aim to impose marketing pitch

We thank Mr Sim Eng Cheong for his letter (Ensure electricity suppliers' registration complies with PDPA; Dec 31, 2018).

At Senoko Energy, we observe the Personal Data Protection Act and protect the privacy of our customers' information.

It was never our intent to require consent for marketing purposes.

We wanted to only serve our customers better and provide added value to them.

We also do not share our customers' data with third parties without their consent.

Our intent was to provide our customers with relevant energy information, updates on our products and services and receive customer feedback.

Customers can also choose their preferred marketing communications under the app's marketing preferences.

We have since tweaked Senoko Energy's online registration page. Customers can now choose whether they want to receive our marketing communications when signing up with us.

Terry Toh
Senior Vice-President
(Legal & Compliance)
Senoko Energy

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Store full of history

The John Little building in Raffles Place in 1955. The store was established by John Martin Little in 1842, and acquired by Robinson & Co in 1955. The building was taken over by the Japanese during WWII. In 1960, the store moved out of Raffles Place.

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- Snoring can be a symptom of Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA).
- Symptoms include Tiredness, Sleepiness, Moodiness, Forgetfulness and Depression.
- OSA is linked to High Blood Pressure, Strokes and Heart Attacks.



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- Ways to overcome Presbyopia 'LaoHua'
- Gain spectacle independence
- What to expect in Cataract Surgery



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Speaker:
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Asia Retina Eye Surgery Centre

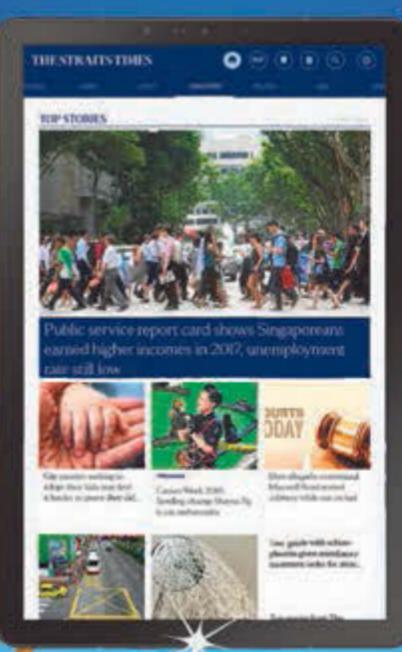


MBBS MRCS (Edinburgh) (UK)
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Speaker:
Dr Kenny Peter Pang
Asia Sleep Centre

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